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Guidance

Making a support bubble with another household

How you can safely expand the group of people you have close contact with during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

From:

Department of Health and Social Care (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care>)

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Applies to:

England (see guidance for Wales (<https://gov.wales/visiting-people-private-homes>), Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/pages/protection-levels-by-area/>), and Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you>))

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What a support bubble is

A support bubble is a support network that links 2 households.

You can only form a support bubble if you meet certain eligibility rules. Not everyone can form a support bubble.

Support bubbles are different from childcare bubbles (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>).

Once you're in a support bubble, you can think of yourself as being in one 'household'. This means you can have close contact with the other household in your bubble as if they were members of your own household.

You do not need to maintain social distancing with people in your support bubble, if you are in one. However, maintaining social distance and taking other precautions such as washing hands and opening windows to let fresh air in will help reduce the spread of coronavirus.

You should follow the guidance on how to stop the spread of coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19>), even if you feel well. This is particularly important if you have formed a support bubble.

Who can make a support bubble

Not everybody can form a support bubble. It is against the law to form a support bubble if you are not eligible.

You can form a support bubble with another household of any size if:

- you live by yourself – even if carers visit you to provide support
- you are the only adult in your household who does not need continuous care as a result of a disability
- your household includes a child who is under the age of one or was under that age on 2 December 2020
- your household includes a child with a disability who requires continuous care and is under the age of 5, or was under that age on 2 December 2020
- you are aged 16 or 17 and live with others of the same age, without any adults
- you are a single adult living with one or more children who are under the age of 18 or were under that age on 12 June 2020

All members of your household must be part of the same bubble. This means you and the people you live with cannot form separate bubbles, even if you meet more than one of the eligibility rules above.

You must not form a support bubble with a household that is part of another support bubble. Your support bubble cannot include more than 2 households.

If you do form a support bubble, it is best if this is with a household that lives locally. This will help prevent the virus spreading from an area where more people are infected.

All members of both households must agree to this arrangement. Children who live with a parent or someone with parental responsibility are not required to agree to the support bubble arrangement.

If you share custody of your child with someone you do not live with

If you share custody of a child with someone you do not live with, the child can move freely between both parents' households. You do not need to form a support bubble or childcare bubble to do this.

Each parent can separately form a support bubble and/or a childcare bubble (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>) with another household if eligible.

You can mix indoors where reasonably necessary with the other parent to allow your child to move between homes.

How support bubbles relate to childcare bubbles

A support bubble is different from a childcare bubble (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>). A childcare bubble allows you to link with another household to provide childcare for children under 14.

Being in a support bubble does not stop you from forming a childcare bubble (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>). Your support and childcare bubble do not have to be with the same household. However, you should avoid seeing members of your childcare and support bubbles at the same time, to limit the risk of spreading coronavirus.

Unlike a support bubble, you must not meet or interact socially with your childcare bubble.

There are no other types of bubble.

Providing care or support

People can continue to gather in larger groups or meet indoors where this is reasonably necessary to:

- provide care or assistance for disabled or vulnerable people, including shopping for essential items and accessing services on their behalf
- provide emergency assistance
- attend a support group (of up to 15 people)
- provide respite care where that care is being provided to a vulnerable person or a person with a disability, or is a short break in respect of a looked-after child

You are not required to form a support bubble to provide these types of care, or carry out these activities. However, you should limit close contact with others as much as possible when doing so, particularly if helping someone who is more vulnerable to coronavirus. You should also take other precautions such as washing your hands and opening windows to let fresh air in. This will help limit the risks of spreading coronavirus.

You should follow the guidance on how to stop the spread of coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19>).

Changing your support bubble

Where possible, you should avoid changing your support bubble. This will help prevent spreading the virus between households.

You may change your support bubble if necessary – for example, if your circumstances or those of your existing support bubble change.

You may change your support bubble provided that:

- your household, or the one you intend to form a new support bubble with, meets at least one of the eligibility rules above
- the other household is not already part of a support bubble which they intend to remain a part of

If you decide to change your support bubble, you should treat your previous bubble as a separate household for a minimum of 10 days before forming a new bubble.

If someone in your previous support bubble develops symptoms or tests positive for coronavirus up to 2 days after members of the bubble last met, all members of the bubble should self-isolate for 10 days (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>). You must not form a new bubble until you have completed your self-isolation, to prevent spreading coronavirus to others.

Rapid lateral flow tests for bubbles of school pupils and staff

If someone in your household, childcare or support bubble is a pupil, student or member of staff at a school, nursery or college, or related occupation (such as a childminder or wraparound childcare provider) you may be eligible for rapid lateral flow testing.

See the guidance on rapid lateral flow testing for households and bubbles of school pupils and staff (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rapid-lateral-flow-testing-for-households-and-bubbles-of-school-pupils-and-staff>)

If you or someone in your support bubble develop coronavirus symptoms or test positive

If you develop coronavirus symptoms

If you develop symptoms, stay at home and get a test (<https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>).

You should follow the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>). Anyone who lives in your household should also follow the stay at home guidance.

If you develop symptoms, you should alert the members of your bubble or anyone else with whom you have had close contact over the last 2 days. You should tell them that you might have coronavirus but are waiting for a test result.

At this stage (until the test result is known), those people should reduce social contacts and take extra care in practising social distancing and good hygiene, like washing their hands regularly. They should also watch out for their own symptoms. If they develop symptoms, they should follow the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>).

If you test positive for coronavirus

If you get a positive test, NHS Test and Trace will contact you (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works#part-1-people-who-develop-symptoms-of-coronavirus>) and ask you to share information about any close contacts you had just before or after you developed symptoms. You should include the members of your support bubble if you had close contact with them during this period.

This is vital if we are to stop the spread of the virus.

If someone else in your bubble develops coronavirus symptoms or tests positive for coronavirus

If someone else in your household develops coronavirus symptoms or tests positive for coronavirus, you should follow the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>).

If someone in your support bubble who you do not live with develops symptoms or tests positive for coronavirus, you should follow the instructions of NHS Test and Trace (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works#part-2-people-who-have-had-close-contact-with-someone-who-has-coronavirus>). If

NHS Test and Trace tell you that you are a contact of someone who has tested positive, you must follow their instructions and self-isolate.

There is further guidance for contacts of people with confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection who do not live with the person (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person>).

If you're clinically extremely vulnerable

People who are defined as clinically extremely vulnerable are thought to be at very high risk of serious illness from coronavirus.

If you're clinically extremely vulnerable, you should continue to follow the guidance for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) and are advised to take additional precautions to protect yourself.

It is important that you continue to keep the number of social interactions that you have low and try to limit the amount of time you spend in settings where you are unable to maintain social distancing.

You can still meet with your support bubble, or form a support bubble, if you are eligible.

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Last updated 29 March 2021 + show all updates

1. 29 March 2021

Updated to reflect new rules on what you can and cannot do from 29 March.

2. 24 March 2021

Updated to clarify rules on eligibility for bubbles, providing care and support, and advice on self-isolation.

3. 15 January 2021

Updated to reflect national lockdown stay at home guidance.

4. 29 December 2020

Update to clarify when you can change your support bubble.

5. 14 December 2020

Updated guidance to reflect that the 14-day isolation period is now 10 days.

6. 8 December 2020

Updated with clarification of how support bubbles work for those in more than one type of bubble, and simplified guidance on travelling to form a support bubble.

7. 2 December 2020

Amended the eligibility criteria for a support bubble and added guidance on how to switch your support bubble.

8. 6 November 2020

Amended the definition of 'what a support bubble is'. Added information about childcare bubbles. Added guidance about forming or maintaining a support bubble if you're clinically extremely vulnerable.

9. 14 September 2020

Updated the guidance to say that support bubbles cannot be changed.

10. 9 September 2020

First published.

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Related content

- Making a childcare bubble with another household (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>)
- COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>)

Brexit

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(<https://www.gov.uk/transition>)

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- Rules and restrictions during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/rules-and-restrictions>)