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Guidance

Meeting people from outside your household

How you can see people that you do not live with while protecting yourself and others from coronavirus (COVID-19).

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From:

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

Applies to:

England (see guidance for Wales (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>), Scotland (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-individuals-and-businesses-in-scotland>), and Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>))

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If you live in an area where local lockdown restrictions are in place you should follow the local lockdown guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>)

If you live in an area that is experiencing a local COVID-19 outbreak and where local lockdown measures have been imposed, different guidance and legislation will apply. Please consult the local lockdown restrictions (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) guidance to see if any restrictions are in place in your area.

The government recognises how difficult it has been for people to be cut off from their family and friends in recent months. This has been necessary to help us all stay alert (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>), control the virus and save lives.

This guidance explains how you can protect yourself and others from coronavirus when meeting people that you do not live with. At all times, it's important to maintain social distancing from people you do not live with to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. You should only have close contact with people outside of your household if you are in a support bubble with them.

You should only meet people you do not live with in 3 types of groups:

- you can continue to meet in any outdoor space in a group of up to 6 people from different households
- single adult households – in other words adults who live alone or with dependent children only – can continue to form an exclusive ‘support bubble’ with one other household
- you can also meet in a group of 2 households (anyone in your support bubble counts as one household), in any location – public or private, indoors or outdoors. This does not need to be the same household each time.

It remains the case – even inside someone’s home – that you should socially distance from anyone not in your household or bubble. Those who have been able to form a support bubble (which is those in single adult households) can continue to have close contact as if they live with the other people in their bubble. This should be exclusive and should not change. This change also does not affect the support you receive from your carers.

Staying alert when meeting people you do not live with

In order to keep you and your family and friends safe, it remains very important that you stay alert (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home>) when meeting family and friends.

You should:

- only socialise indoors with members of up to 2 households – this includes when dining out or going to the pub
- socialise outdoors in a group of up to 6 people from different households or up to 2 households (anyone in your support bubble counts as one household)
- not hold or attend celebrations (such as parties) where it is difficult to maintain social distancing and avoid close social interaction – even if they are organised by businesses and venues that are taking steps to follow COVID-19 secure guidelines
- only stay overnight with your household (including your support bubble) and one other household
- limit social interaction with anyone outside the group you are attending a place with, even if you see other people you know, for example, in a restaurant, community centre or place of worship
- try to limit the number of people you see, especially over short periods of time, to keep you and them safe, and save lives. The more people with whom you interact, the more chances we give the virus to spread

You can also minimise the risk of spreading infection by following some key principles. You should:

- continue to follow strict social distancing guidelines when you are with anyone not in your household or your support bubble
- take hygiene precautions by washing your hands as soon as you are home for at least 20 seconds, use hand sanitiser when you are out, use a tissue when sneezing and dispose of it safely, and cough into the crook of your elbow
- form a support bubble with one other household, and if you or they are in a single adult household. You should not change or add to your support bubble once formed

- access private gardens externally wherever possible – if you need to go through someone else’s home to do so, avoid touching surfaces and loitering
- avoid using toilets in other people’s home (outside of your support bubble) wherever possible and wipe down surfaces as frequently as possible
- using disinfectant, wipe down any surfaces or door handles people from outside of your household or support bubble come into contact with if walking through your home
- avoid sharing plates and utensils with people outside of your household or your support bubble
- avoid using paddling pools or other garden equipment with people outside of your household or bubble

Where to meet indoors

Members of 2 different households can meet in any indoor space, including a private home. Anyone in your support bubble counts as one household.

You should, wherever possible, socially distance from people you do not live with or who are not in your support bubble and take particular care to maintain excellent hygiene – washing hands and surfaces – when using shared facilities like bathrooms.

Where to meet outdoors

You can meet people in both public and private outdoor spaces, such as gardens, yards or roof terraces – but you should maintain social distancing at all times with people who are not in your household or support bubble. Garages, sheds or cabins are all indoor areas where the risk of transmission is as high as if you were in a small room in a house.

If you do need to use the toilet in someone’s home or are passing through to access someone’s garden, try to avoid touching surfaces and if you use the toilet wash your hands thoroughly, wipe down surfaces, use separate towels or paper towels and wash or dispose of them safely after use.

Going to a pub or restaurant with members of another household

When eating or drinking out with people you do not live with, you should only meet one other household if you are seated indoors.

If you are eating or drinking outdoors, you can do so with one other household or in a group of up to 6 people from different households. You should take care to limit your interactions with anyone outside the group you visit these places with.

In all cases, people from different households (unless in support bubbles) should ensure they socially distance as much as possible. Premises should also take reasonable steps to help you do so in line with COVID-19 secure principles.

Staying overnight with members of another household

You, and members of your household or support bubble, should only stay overnight with your household (including your support bubble) and one other household. This can be in each other’s homes or other accommodation, such as hotels or apartments. You should, wherever possible, socially distance from people you do not normally live with, take particular care to maintain excellent hygiene – washing hands and surfaces – and avoid using shared facilities like bathrooms wherever possible.

Sharing food and drink

You should try, wherever possible, not to pass each other food or drink unless you live together or are in a support bubble together. You should ensure that plates or utensils are thoroughly cleaned before use. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly for at least 20 seconds and use disposable towels if possible.

Using garden equipment

You should not share garden equipment with people outside of your household or your support bubble because of the risk of transmission from shared surfaces. You could bring your own equipment or if you have to use chairs, for example, you should wipe them down carefully with household cleaner before and after use.

You should try to avoid shared equipment. For example you should use your own tennis racquet, golf club or basketball. Any equipment that is used should be cleaned frequently. Cleaning should be particularly thorough if it is to be used by someone else.

You should avoid using paddling pools and private swimming pools with people outside of your household or support bubble.

Playing sport

The government has published guidance on how team sports can restart safely (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation>).

Sports governing bodies are developing tailored guidance outlining how their sport can be conducted safely, which will be reviewed by Public Health England. People should follow the approved guidance when playing team sports.

You are able to play team sport in any number if this is formally organised by a sports club or similar organisation and sports-governing body guidance has been issued. Where there is clear guidance in place, sports can be played in groups larger than 2 households. If you are playing one of these sports informally, such as in the park or a private garden, there should be no more than 30 people involved (including participants, coaches, umpires, spectators).

Team sports that do not have approved guidance should not be played. Instead, people should train together and take part in activities, such as conditioning or fitness sessions in groups of no more than 6 people (outdoors) or 2 households (in any setting). You should socially distance from people you do not live with. While groups could practise ball skills like passing and kicking, equipment sharing should be kept to a minimum and strong hygiene practices should be in place before and after.

You can also play non-team sports, such as tennis, with people from outside of your household (or support bubble) but you should socially distance wherever possible. Any equipment that is used should be cleaned frequently. Cleaning should be particularly thorough if equipment is to be used by someone else.

Gatherings in COVID-19 secure venues

When meeting friends and family, even in venues like restaurants, pubs, places of worship or community centres, you should follow the guidance on gatherings and:

- only meet indoors in groups up to 2 households – this includes when dining out or going to the pub

- only meet outdoors in a group of no more than 2 households or in a group of up to 6 people from different households

Anyone in your support bubble counts as one household.

Clubs or groups can begin to meet again in COVID-19 secure venues. However, you should take care to remain socially distant from anyone you do not live with or is not in your support bubble. You should also limit social interaction with anyone outside of these formal activities even if you see other people you know. Venues should ensure they comply with COVID-19 secure guidelines.

It's against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces), or in a public outdoor space, unless planned by an organisation in compliance with COVID-19 secure guidance. The government will be introducing fines for those who facilitate or organise illegal gatherings of over 30 people.

Group prayer

Places of worship can open for services and group prayer, but should operate in compliance with COVID-19 secure guidelines. You should socially distance from anyone you do not live with or who is not in your support bubble. You should also limit social interaction with anyone outside the group you are with even if you see other people you know.

Travelling to meet people

You can travel to meet people irrespective of distance. You may use public transport but should consider cycling, walking or driving wherever possible.

This guidance applies to England. You must adhere to the individual country laws and guidance of the devolved administrations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

You should take particularly care if you are travelling to an area that is experiencing a local COVID-19 outbreak and where local lockdown measures (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) have been imposed – you should avoid doing so if possible.

You should not travel with someone from outside your household or your support bubble unless you can practise social distancing, for example by cycling.

Gathering in larger groups

You should only be socialising in groups of up to 2 households (including your support bubble) indoors and outdoors or up to 6 people from different households when outdoors.

More generally, you can continue to meet in larger groups if necessary for work, voluntary or charitable services, education, childcare or training, elite sporting competition or training, to fulfil legal obligations, to provide emergency assistance, or to enable someone to avoid illness, injury or risk of harm.

You can also meet in larger groups for weddings, funerals, religious ceremonies and services, community activities and support groups - which should be limited to no more than 30 people and subject to COVID-19 secure guidelines.

It is otherwise against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes (including gardens and other outdoor spaces). Businesses and venues following COVID-19 secure guidelines can host larger groups. This is also the case for events in public outdoor spaces that are organised by businesses, charitable or political organisations, and public bodies, provided they take

reasonable steps to mitigate the risk of transmission, in line with COVID-19 secure guidance and including completion of a risk assessment. The government will be introducing fines for the organisers or those who facilitate illegal gatherings of over 30 people.

If taking part in activities with larger groups, you should take particular care to follow social distancing guidelines. In addition to those guidelines, the following principles should be observed to ensure you meet people in a way that minimises the risk of spreading infection:

- limit the time you spend interacting with people from outside your household or support bubble to the activity which you are partaking in
- limit the number of different activities which you partake in succession to reduce the potential chain of transmission
- group size should be limited to the minimum which allows the activity to take place
- maintain high standards of hand hygiene
- if organising an activity, you should carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment to identify actions which could minimise the risk of transmission. Employers have a legal responsibility to protect workers and others from risk to their health and safety.
- you are also strongly encouraged to wear a face covering in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing may be difficult and where you come into contact with people you do not normally meet

Making a support bubble with another household

In England, if you live by yourself or are a single parent with dependant children – in other words, if there is only one adult in your home – you can expand your close support network so that it includes one other household of any size. This is called making a ‘support bubble’ and means you are able to have close contact with them as you could if they were members of your own household.

We recognise how difficult this time has been, particularly on lonely and isolated people, and this change is designed to provide extra support to some of those most impacted by the current social restrictions. Once you are in a support bubble, you can think of yourself as in a single household.

Keeping support bubbles exclusive

You should not change who is in your bubble or have close contact with anyone else you do not live with. This is critical to keeping you, and your family and friends, as safe as possible.

Members of support bubbles developing coronavirus symptoms

If you or someone in your household or your support bubble (if applicable) are showing coronavirus symptoms, everyone in your support bubble should stay home. If you or a member of your support bubble is contacted as part of the test and trace programme, the individual contacted should stay at home. If the individual develops symptoms, everyone in the support bubble should then isolate. This is critical to staying as safe as possible and saving lives.

Physical contact with members of your support bubble

You can have close physical contact with members of your support bubble if you and they want to. Members of your support bubble can effectively be treated like members of your household.

Support bubbles are a cautious step to help people who may be lonely and therefore at greatest risk of isolation. You do not need to socially distance from people in your bubble, but good hand hygiene and other measures can help to keep you and the people you meet as safe as possible.

Some people already take extra precautions with those they live with – for example, if one of them is clinically vulnerable, or one of them has a lot of contact outside the house - and you might want to do the same if you expand your bubble.

Support bubbles and isolation

If any member of your support bubble – either someone in your own household or one that you have formed a bubble with – develops symptoms or tests positive for coronavirus you should follow advice on household isolation.

If you share custody of your child, and you and your child's other parent are both in separate bubbles, all households would need to isolate if someone develops symptoms in the group.

If you are clinically extremely vulnerable (shielding)

If you are shielding, you may, if you wish, also form a 'support bubble' with one single adult household. All those in a support bubble will be able to spend time together inside each other's homes, including overnight, without needing to socially distance.

The guidance for the clinically extremely vulnerable is that shielding has been paused. See guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>).

If you are clinically vulnerable or have a higher risk of catching coronavirus (such as a frontline healthcare worker)

If you are clinically vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing#clinically-vulnerable-people>), you should continue to take particular care to minimise contact with others. You should bear this in mind when deciding to form a support bubble. If you are at a higher risk of exposure to those with coronavirus (for example, if someone in your house is a healthcare or care worker that interacts with patients that have coronavirus), you should take particular care when deciding whether to form a support bubble.

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

Children with separated parents have always been permitted to move between both households. It is also permitted for those households – if there is only a single adult in them – to form a support bubble with another household.

However, it is very important that if someone in any of these linked households shows coronavirus symptoms, or is otherwise self-isolating, you should all stay at home (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>). This is critical to controlling the virus, by avoiding a chain of transmission.

Using a support bubble for informal childcare

If you are a lone parent you can form a support bubble with another household to provide informal (unpaid) childcare for them or for them to provide informal childcare for you. You should not form a support bubble with more than one household.

Lone adults with children over 18

If you live with children over the age of 18, you will not be able to form a support bubble.

The exception to this is if the child was under the age of 18 on 12 June 2020 and is in a single-parent household. That household can continue to participate in their current support bubble or form a support bubble if they have not already done so, once that child turns 18. This is a targeted intervention to provide extra support to some of those most impacted by the current social restrictions.

Lone adults with carers

If you are the only adult in your household, then you will be able to form a support bubble with any other household that is willing to exclusively bubble with you. This is irrespective of whether carers visit you to provide support.

If you live with other adults including your carers, then you will still be able to form a support bubble, however this would need to be with a single adult household.

Travelling to form a support bubble

There is no limit on how far you can travel in England to meet members of your support bubble but we recommend that you form a support bubble with someone who lives locally wherever possible. This will help to prevent the virus spreading from an area where there might be a higher rate of infection. If you live in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland you must follow the specific rules in those parts of the UK.

Returning from abroad

When you arrive in England you will need to self-isolate unless you are arriving from an exempt country. You should self-isolate in one place for the full 14 days, where you can have food and other necessities delivered, and stay away from others, including people you bubble with. See guidance on how to self-isolate when you travel to the UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk>).

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1. 14 August 2020

Added information that the government will be introducing fines for those who facilitate or organise illegal gatherings of over 30 people, and updated guidance on shielding.

2. 17 July 2020

Updated the guidance on gathering in larger groups and travelling to meet people, and the guidance for clinically extremely vulnerable people.

3. 9 July 2020

Updated guidance for team sport

4. 4 July 2020

Updated guidance in line with new regulations

5. 23 June 2020

First published.

Related content

- Coronavirus outbreak FAQs: what you can and can't do (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>)
- North of England: local restrictions (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/north-west-of-england-local-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do>)
- Staying alert and safe (social distancing) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>)
- 31 July announcement (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/31-july-announcement>)
- Local restrictions: areas with an outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-restrictions-areas-with-an-outbreak-of-coronavirus-covid-19>)

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