

1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
 2. Health and social care (<https://www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care>)
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 6. COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>)
- Public Health England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>)

Guidance

Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection

Updated 18 December 2020

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Who this guidance is for

It is important that we all take steps to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) infection in the community to save lives and protect the NHS.

This guidance is for:

- people with symptoms that may be caused by COVID-19, including those who are waiting for a test
- people who have received a positive COVID-19 test result (whether or not they have symptoms)
- people who currently live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 symptoms, or with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19

In this guidance a household means:

- one person living alone
- a group of people (who may or may not be related) living at the same address and who share cooking facilities, bathrooms or toilets and/or living areas. This may include students in boarding schools or halls of residence who share such facilities

This guidance also applies to people in your support bubble (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household>) or childcare bubble (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>).

Follow separate guidance (<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>) if you have had contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 but do not currently live in the same household as them. If you have arrived in the UK from overseas you may also need to self-isolate (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk>).

Symptoms

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

For most people, COVID-19 will be a mild illness. However, if you have any of the symptoms above, stay at home and arrange to have a test (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>).

There are several other symptoms linked with COVID-19. These other symptoms may have another cause and are not on their own a reason to have a COVID-19 test. If you are concerned about your symptoms, seek medical advice.

Tests for COVID-19

Two types of test are currently being used to detect if someone has COVID-19:

- Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests
- Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests

PCR tests detect the RNA (ribonucleic acid, the genetic material) of a virus. PCR tests are the most reliable COVID-19 tests. It takes some time to get the results because they are usually processed in a laboratory.

LFD tests detect proteins in the coronavirus and work in a similar way to a pregnancy test. They are simple and quick to use. LFD tests are not as accurate as PCR tests and are mainly used in people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19. Anyone who has a positive LFD test should have a PCR test to confirm the result within 48 hours.

Main messages

Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test result must stay at home for the full isolation period. This is because they could pass it on to others, even if they don't have symptoms.

It may be difficult for some people to separate themselves from others in their household. Not all these measures will be possible if you are living with children or have caring responsibilities but follow this guidance to the best of your ability in these circumstances.

If you have COVID-19 symptoms or have received a positive COVID-19 test result

Stay at home and self-isolate

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, stay at home and self-isolate immediately. If you have a positive test result but do not have symptoms, stay at home and self-isolate as soon as you receive the results. Your household needs to isolate too.

Arrange to have a PCR test (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus>) for COVID-19 if you have not already had one. Stay at home while you are waiting for a home test kit, a test site appointment or a test result. You can leave your home in certain circumstances (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/1045/made>), but do not go to work, school, or public areas and do not use public transport or taxis. Only leave your home to get to your test if you need to, observe strict social distancing advice and return immediately afterwards.

Your isolation period includes the day your symptoms started (or the day your test was taken if you do not have symptoms), and the next 10 full days. This means that if, for example, your symptoms started at any time on the 15th of the month (or if you did not have symptoms but your first positive COVID-19 test was taken on the 15th), your isolation period ends at 23:59 hrs on the 25th.

A positive PCR test result means you must complete your full isolation period. Your official isolation period starts immediately from when your symptoms started. If you do not have any symptoms and test positive via a LFD test you should self-isolate until you have taken a confirmatory PCR test.

The official 10-day self-isolation period begins from the positive PCR result.

A positive LFD test result also means you must complete 10 days isolation, unless this is followed by a PCR test and the result is negative.

You can return to your normal routine and stop self-isolating after 10 full days if your symptoms have gone, or if the only symptoms you have are a cough or anosmia, which can last for several weeks. If you still have a high temperature after 10 days or are otherwise unwell, stay at home and seek medical advice.

If you are isolating because of a positive test result but did not have any symptoms, and you develop COVID-19 symptoms within your isolation period, start a new 10 day isolation period by counting 10 full days from the day following your symptom onset.

Most people with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness. Seek prompt medical attention if your illness or the illness of someone in your household is worsening.

Stay as far away from other members of your household as possible, especially if they are clinically extremely vulnerable (<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>). Wherever possible, avoid using shared spaces such as kitchens and other living areas while others are present and take your meals back to your room to eat. Wear a face covering (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>) or a surgical mask when spending time in shared areas inside your home.

Take exercise within your home, garden or private outdoor space. Follow the general advice to reduce the spread of the infection (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection#reduce>) within your household.

If you have a negative COVID-19 PCR test result following a positive LFD test

If you have a PCR test following a positive LFD test, and the result is negative, you and your household can stop isolating.

If you have a negative COVID-19 PCR test result after being tested because you had symptoms

If your PCR test result is negative but you still have symptoms, you may have another virus such as a cold or flu. You should stay at home until you feel well. Seek medical attention if you are concerned about your symptoms.

You can stop isolating as long as:

- you are well
- no-one else in your household has symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19
- you have not been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace

(<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/nhs-test-and-trace-if-youve-been-in-contact-with-a-person-who-has-coronavirus/>)

- you have not arrived into the UK from a non-exempt country (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk>) within the last 10 days. Separate guidance is available if you are participating in the Test to Release for international travel scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-test-to-release-for-international-travel>)

Anyone in your household who is isolating because of your symptoms can also stop isolating.

After your isolation period has ended

If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you will probably have developed some immunity to the disease. However, it cannot be guaranteed that everyone will develop immunity, or how long it will last. It is possible for PCR tests to remain positive for sometime after COVID-19 infection. Anyone who has previously received a positive test result for COVID-19 should only be re-tested within a 90-day period if they develop any new symptoms of COVID-19.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms at any point after ending your first period of isolation you and your household should follow the steps in this guidance again.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms and had a positive test result more than 10 days ago, you should stay at home and seek medical advice.

NHS Test and Trace

You will receive a request by text, email or phone to log into the NHS Test and Trace (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/nhs-test-and-trace-if-youve-been-in-contact-with-a-person-who-has-coronavirus/>)^[footnote 1] service website and provide information about your symptoms and when they started. The 3 main symptoms of COVID-19 are used to identify when someone should seek a test and when they should self-isolate from. You may have experienced other symptoms before developing any of the 3 main symptoms (a cough, high temperature or loss of smell or taste), and the timing of these other symptoms will be used to identify your contacts.

You will be asked about your recent contacts so that they can be given public health advice. They will not be told your identity. It is very important that you provide this information, as it will play a vital role in helping to protect your family, friends and the wider community.

If you are asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/nhs-test-and-trace-if-youve-been-in-contact-with-a-person-who-has-coronavirus/>), including by the NHS COVID-19 app (<https://faq.covid19.nhs.uk/article/KA-01339/en-us>), you may be entitled to a payment of £500 from your local authority under the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme>).

You could be fined if you do not stay at home and self-isolate following a positive PCR test result for COVID-19 and you are notified by NHS Test and Trace that you need to self-isolate.

If you live in the same household as someone with COVID-19

Stay at home and self-isolate. Do not go to work, school, or public areas and do not use public transport or taxis.

Your isolation period includes the day the first person in your household's symptoms started (or the day their test was taken if they did not have symptoms, whether this was an LFD or PCR test), and the next 10 full days. This means that if, for example, your 10 day isolation period starts on the 15th of the month, your isolation period ends at 23:59 hrs on the 25th and you can return to your normal routine.

If you do not have symptoms of COVID-19 yourself, you do not need a test. Only arrange a test if you develop COVID-19 symptoms or if you are asked to do so as part of a wider testing scheme. If for any reason you have a negative test result during your 10 day isolation period, you must continue to self-isolate. Even if you don't have symptoms, you could still pass the infection on to others. Stay at home for the full 10 days to avoid putting others at risk.

If you develop symptoms while you are isolating, arrange to have a COVID-19 PCR test (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>). If your test result is positive, follow the advice for people with COVID-19 to stay at home and start a further full 10 day isolation period. This begins when your symptoms started, regardless of where you are in your original 10 day isolation period. This means that your total isolation period will be longer than 10 days.

If other household members develop symptoms during this period, you do not need to isolate for longer than 10 days.

If you are identified as a contact and asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/nhs-test-and-trace-if-youve-been-in-contact-with-a-person-who-has-coronavirus/>), including by the NHS COVID-19 app (<https://faq.covid19.nhs.uk/article/KA-01339/en-us>) you may be entitled to a payment of £500 from your local authority under the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme>).

Failure to comply with self-isolation may result in a fine, starting from £1,000. Parents or guardians are legally responsible for ensuring that anyone under 18 self-isolates if they test positive for COVID-19 and are contacted by NHS Test and Trace and told to self-isolate.

Visitors to the household

Do not invite or allow social visitors to enter your home, including friends and family. If you want to speak to someone who is not a member of your household, use the phone, email or social media.

If you or a family member receive essential care in your home, carers should continue to visit and follow the provision of home care guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-providing-home-care/coronavirus-covid-19-provision-of-home-care>) to reduce the risk of infection.

All non-essential in-house services and repairs should be postponed until the self-isolation period is completed.

How COVID-19 is spread

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through small droplets, aerosols and through direct contact. Surfaces and belongings can also be contaminated with COVID-19 when people with the infection cough or sneeze or touch them. The risk of spread is greatest when people are close to each other, especially in poorly ventilated indoor spaces and when people spend a lot of time together in the same room.

Social distancing, washing your hands and good respiratory hygiene (using and disposing of tissues), cleaning surfaces and keeping indoor spaces well ventilated (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>) are the most important ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

People who have COVID-19 can infect others from around 2 days before symptoms start, and for up to 10 days after. They can pass the infection to others, even if they have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all, which is why they must stay at home.

People who live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 are at higher risk of developing COVID-19. They could spread the disease to others even when feeling well, which is why they must stay at home.

How to limit close contact with others in the household if you have COVID-19

Spend as little time as possible in shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas. Avoid using shared spaces such as kitchens and other living areas while others are present and take your meals back to your room to eat. Observe strict social distancing.

Ask the people you live with to help by bringing your meals to you, helping with cleaning and by giving you space.

Use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household where possible. If a separate bathroom is not available, try and use the facilities last, before cleaning the bathroom using your usual cleaning products. The bathroom should be cleaned regularly.

You should use separate towels from other household members, both for drying yourself after bathing or showering and for drying your hands. Keep your room well-ventilated by opening a window to the outside.

Use a face covering (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>) or a surgical mask when spending time in shared areas inside your home to minimise the risk of spread to others. Used correctly, they may help to protect others by reducing the transmission of COVID-19 but they do not replace the need to limit your contact with other household members.

You can find more advice on reducing the risks from COVID-19 in your home at GermDefence (<https://www.germdefence.org/>).

Those who are clinically extremely vulnerable (<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>) should be supported to minimise their contact with other people in the household during this period, regardless of whether others have symptoms or not.

Reducing the spread of COVID-19 in your household

Everyone should take the following steps to reduce the spread of infection within their household.

Wash your hands

This is an important way to reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 or passing it on to others. Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser, particularly after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose and before you eat or handle food. Clean your hands frequently and avoid touching your face.

Cover coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues when you cough or sneeze. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow, not into your hand.

Dispose of tissues into a rubbish bag and immediately wash your hands. If you have a carer, they should use disposable tissues to wipe away any mucus or phlegm after you have sneezed or coughed and then wash or sanitise their hands.

Clean your home to reduce spread of infection

Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles and remote controls, and shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms. This is particularly important if you have a clinically extremely vulnerable (<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>) person in the house.

Use standard household cleaning products like detergents and bleach to clean your home as these are very effective at getting rid of the virus on surfaces. Clean shared bathrooms each time they are used, especially the surfaces you have touched, using your usual bathroom cleaning products.

Cleaning cloths and personal waste such as used tissues and disposable face coverings should be stored in disposable rubbish bags. These bags should be placed into another bag, tied securely and put aside for at least 72 hours before being put in your usual external household waste bin. Other household waste can be disposed of as normal.

Use a dishwasher to clean and dry your crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them by hand using washing up liquid and warm water and dry thoroughly using a separate tea towel.

Laundry

To reduce the possibility of spreading the virus through the air, do not shake dirty laundry. Wash items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. All dirty laundry can be washed in the same load. If you do not have a washing machine, wait a further 72 hours after your self-isolation has ended when you can then take the laundry to a public launderette.

Do not share towels, including hand towels and tea towels.

Ventilate indoor areas

Keep indoor areas well-ventilated (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>) with fresh air, especially shared living areas. To increase the flow of air you can:

- open windows as much as possible
- open doors
- make sure that any vents are open and airflow is not blocked
- leave extractor fans (for example in bathrooms) running for longer than usual with the door closed after use

Caring for pets

COVID-19 in the UK is spread between humans. There is limited evidence that some animals, including pets, can become infected with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) following close contact with infected humans.

Pet owners who have COVID-19 or who are self-isolating with symptoms should restrict contact with pets and wash their hands thoroughly before and after interacting with their pet.

Looking after your health and wellbeing

Looking after your mental and physical wellbeing while staying at home

Staying at home and self-isolating for a prolonged period can be difficult, frustrating and lonely for some people and you or other household members may feel low. It can be particularly challenging if you do not have much space or access to a garden.

Remember to take care of your mind as well as your body and get support if you need it. There are many sources of support and information, such as guidance on looking after your mental health and wellbeing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>) and on supporting children and young people (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing>).

Every Mind Matters (<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>) provides simple tips and advice to take better care of your mental health, including a COVID-19 hub with advice for those staying at home.

Many people find it helpful to remind themselves why what they are doing is so important. By staying at home, you are helping to protect your friends and family, other people in your community and the NHS.

Things that you can do to help make staying at home easier:

- keep in touch with friends and family over the phone or through social media
- remember that physical exercise can be good for your wellbeing. Look for online classes or courses that can help you take light exercise in your home
- plan ahead and think about what you will need to be able to stay at home for the full duration

- ask your employer, friends and family for help to access the things you will need while staying at home
- think about and plan how you can get food and other supplies, such as medication, that you will need during this period
- check if your neighbourhood or local community has a volunteer system that could help bring you supplies or provide other support
- ask friends or family to drop off anything you need or order supplies online or by phone, making sure these are left outside your home for you to collect
- think about things you can do during your time at home such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films
- many people find it helpful to plan out the full 10 days. You may also find it helpful to plan in advance what you will do if, for example, someone in your household were to feel much worse

If you need help for a mental health crisis, emergency or breakdown, seek immediate advice and assessment. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, urgent mental health support is available to adults and children around the clock. Find your local NHS helpline (<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/where-to-get-urgent-help-for-mental-health/>) by searching for your postcode or home town in a new service finder.

If you need medical advice

Health and care services remain open to help people with all health conditions, including COVID-19. Most people with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness which can be managed at home. Find out more about managing the symptoms of COVID-19 at home (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/how-to-treat-symptoms-at-home/>).

All routine medical and dental appointments should be cancelled while you are staying at home. If you are concerned or have been asked to attend in person during this time, discuss this with your medical contact first (for example, your GP or dentist, local hospital or outpatient service).

Seek prompt medical attention if your illness or the illness of someone in your household is worsening. If it is not an emergency, contact the NHS 111 online (<https://111.nhs.uk/>) COVID-19 service or NHS 111 for other health conditions. If you have no internet access, call NHS 111.

If it is a medical emergency and you need to call an ambulance, dial 999. Inform the call handler or operator that you or someone in your household has COVID-19 or symptoms if that is the case.

Financial or other practical support

Self-isolation is one of the most important things we can do to help stop the spread of the virus and protect our friends and family, our community and the NHS. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, have received a positive test result, or have been told you are a contact with someone who has, self-isolation is the only way to guarantee you won't pass COVID-19 to others. If you are told to isolate, you should do so straight away. Find out what support you can get if you're affected by coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support>) is available.

Ask your employer, friends and family for help to access the things you will need while staying at home. More information on accessing food and essential supplies (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-accessing-food-and-essential-supplies>) is available.

Check if your neighbourhood or local community has a volunteer system that could help bring you supplies or provide other support. Ask friends or family to drop off anything you need or order supplies online or by phone, making sure these are left outside your home for you to collect.

If you are unable to work due to COVID-19, see guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/worker-support>) to find out about support available to you. You may be entitled to a one-off payment of £500 through the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme-claiming-financial-support/claiming-financial-support-under-the-test-and-trace-support-payment-scheme>) if you are required to stay at home and self-isolate. You can apply for the NHS Test and Trace Support Payment online or through the NHS COVID-19 app (<https://faq.covid19.nhs.uk/article/KA-01339/en-us>).

You will be eligible if you live in England and meet all the following criteria:

- you have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, including by the NHS COVID-19 app
- you are employed or self-employed
- you cannot work from home and will lose income as a result
- you are claiming at least one of the following benefits:
- you are claiming at least one of the following benefits:
 - Universal Credit
 - Working Tax Credits
 - income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - Income Support
 - Pension Credit or Housing Benefit

Visit your local authority's website for more information.

If you are breastfeeding

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, have tested positive or are living in a household with someone who has COVID-19, you may be concerned about the infection spreading to your baby if you are breastfeeding.

The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh any potential risks of transmission of the virus through breast milk or by being in close contact, however, this will be an individual decision. Talk to your midwife, health visitor or GP by telephone.

There is currently no evidence to suggest that the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted through breast milk. However, COVID-19 infection can be passed on to a baby in the same way as it can to anyone in close contact with you. The current evidence is that children with COVID-19 get much less severe symptoms than adults. If you or a family member are feeding with formula or expressed milk, sterilise the equipment carefully before each use. You should not share bottles or a breast pump with someone else.

You can find more information from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>).

People with learning disabilities, autism or serious mental illnesses

Not all these measures will be possible if you, or those you live with, have conditions such as learning disabilities, autism or serious mental illnesses. Follow this guidance to the best of your ability, whilst keeping yourself and those close to you safe and well, ideally in line with any existing care plans.

1. For the purposes of this guidance this includes Test and Trace contact tracers/call handlers, local authority contact tracers working with NHS Test and Trace, Public Health England health protection teams and NHS staff (for healthcare contacts)

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