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1. Home (https://www.gov.uk/)
2. 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)

1. Cabinet Office (https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office)

Guidance

Coronavirus outbreak FAQs: what you can and can't do

Updated 11 May 2020

Contents

1. Public spaces / outdoor activities / exercise
2. Vulnerable groups, shielding, 70 year olds and over, and care homes
3. Going to work / Safer spaces
4. Workers’ rights
5. Public Transport
6. Schools and Childcare
7. Borders / international visitors
8. Enforcement
9. Devolved administrations

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All changes will come into effect on Wednesday 13 May. Until then you should follow existing guidance on social distancing (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing).

The government has set out its plan to return life to as near normal as we can, for as many people as we can, as quickly and fairly as possible in order to safeguard livelihoods, but in a way that is safe and continues to protect our NHS.

The government has published staying safe outside your home (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home) for guidance on what the new rules will mean. These will take effect on Wednesday. This page sets out key FAQ to inform the public and help you prepare for these changes.

This guidance applies in England – people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should follow the specific rules in those parts of the UK.

1. Public spaces / outdoor activities / exercise

1.1 What can I do from Wednesday 13 May that I couldn't do before?

There will be a limited number of things you can do on Wednesday that you cannot do now:

- spend time outdoors – for example sitting and enjoying the fresh air, picnicking, or sunbathing
- meet one other person from a different household outdoors - following social distancing guidelines
- exercise outdoors as often as you wish - following social distancing guidelines
- use outdoor sports courts or facilities, such as a tennis or basketball court, or golf course – with members of your household, or one other person while staying 2 metres apart
- go to a garden centre

At all times, you should continue to observe social distancing guidelines when you are outside your home, including ensuring you are 2 metres away from anyone outside your household. As with before, you cannot:

- visit friends and family in their homes
- exercise in an indoor sports court, gym or leisure centre, or go swimming in a public pool
- use an outdoor gym or playground
- visit a private or ticketed attraction
- gather in a group of more than two (excluding members of your own household), except for a few specific exceptions set out in law (for work, funerals, house moves, supporting the vulnerable, in emergencies and to fulfil legal obligations)

If you are showing coronavirus symptoms, or if you or any of your household are self-isolating, you should stay at home - this is critical to staying safe and saving lives.

1.2 I don't have to stay at home anymore?

You should stay at home as much as possible. The reasons you may leave home include:

- for work, where you cannot work from home
- going to shops that are permitted to be open - to get things like food and medicine
- to exercise or spend time outdoors
- any medical need, including to donate blood, avoid injury or illness, escape risk of harm, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person

These reasons are exceptions and a fuller list is set out in the regulations (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/350/made). Even when doing these activities, you should be minimising time spent away from the home and ensuring that you are two metres apart from anyone outside of your household.

1.3 Are you reopening tennis courts / golf courses / basketball courts etc

Yes. Sports courts can re-open, but you should only partake in such activities alone, with members of your household, or with one other person from outside your household, while practising social distancing. You should take particular care if you need to use any indoor facilities next to these outdoor courts, such as toilets.

You should not use these facilities if you are showing coronavirus symptoms, or if you or any of your household are self-isolating.

1.4 Can I meet my friends and family in the park?

You can meet one other person from outside your household if you are outdoors. Public gatherings of more than 2 people from different households are prohibited in law. There are no limits on gatherings in the park with members of your household.

1.5 On what date can I expand my household group?

The government has asked the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) to advise on the concept of “bubbles”, which would mean allowing people to expand their household group to include one other household. For the time being, you cannot visit friends or family, except to spend time outdoors with up to one person from a different household.

1.6 Can I go out to help a vulnerable person?

You can go out to care for or help a vulnerable person, or to provide other voluntary or charitable services, following the advice set out here. You should not do so if you have coronavirus symptoms, however mild.

Wherever possible, you should stay at least two metres away from others, and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds (or use hand sanitiser if soap and water are not available).

1.7 Are there restrictions on how far I can travel for my exercise or outdoor activity?

No. You can travel to outdoor open space irrespective of distance. You shouldn’t travel with someone from outside your household unless you can practise social distancing - for example by cycling. Leaving your home - the place you live - to stay at another home is not allowed.

1.8 Can I share a private vehicle with someone from another household?

No. You can only travel in a private vehicle alone, or with members of your household.

1.9 Are day trips and holidays ok? Can people stay in second homes?

Day trips to outdoor open space, in a private vehicle, are permitted. You should practise social distancing from other people outside your household.

Leaving your home - the place you live - to stay at another home for a holiday or other purpose is not allowed. This includes visiting second homes.

Premises such as hotels and bed and breakfasts will remain closed, except where providing accommodation for specific reasons set out in law, such as for critical workers where required for a reason relating to their work.

1.10 Can students return to their family home if they've been in halls all this time?

In general, leaving your home - the place you live - to stay at another home is not allowed.

If a student is moving permanently to live back at their family home, this is permitted.

1.11 Is there a limit on the number of people attending funerals?

There is no change to the guidance on attending funerals (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic) at present.

1.12 Can weddings go ahead?

There's no change at this time, but we have set out our intention to enable small wedding ceremonies from 1 June. We understand the frustration couples planning a wedding must be feeling at this time. As with all the necessary coronavirus restrictions on register offices, places of worship and other venues, we will look to ease them as soon as it is safe to do so. We will work closely with faith leaders and local government over the coming weeks to go through the practicalities.

2. Vulnerable groups, shielding, 70 year olds and over, and care homes

2.1 Does easing restrictions apply to healthy 70 year olds and over?

The advice for those aged 70 and over continues to be that they should take particular care to minimise contact with others outside their household.

If they do go out more frequently, they should be careful to maintain distance from others. They and everyone should continue to comply with any general social distancing restrictions.

We know that those aged 70 and over can be absolutely fit and healthy and it's not the case that everybody over 70 has a chronic health condition or an underlying disease.

But unfortunately, we also know that as you get older, there is a higher risk of coronavirus having a more serious impact with infection. Complications and deaths are more common in the elderly, even those without pre-existing conditions.

Anyone who has been advised to shield by the NHS or their GP, including those 70 and over, should continue to do this until at least the end of June.

2.2 How long will shielding be in place?

We've advised individuals with very specific medical conditions to shield until the end of June and to do everything they can to stay at home. This is because we believe they are likely to be at the greatest risk of serious complications from coronavirus.

We know this is challenging guidance to follow, which is why we have a support scheme in place to provide help with access to food and basic supplies, care, medicines and social support.

We are keeping the guidance to shielded people (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19) under review.

2.3 What safety standards will need to be put in place in care homes?

We have issued detailed guidance about infection control and staff safety in care homes (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/881329/COVID-19_How_to_work_safely_in_care_homes.pdf) to help admit and care for residents safely and protect care home staff.

This includes isolation procedures, PPE and infection control training for all staff, cleaning and how to provide personal care safely.

As with all of our advice, this guidance is kept under constant review and updated frequently, in line with the latest scientific evidence.

3. Going to work / Safer spaces

3.1 Who is allowed to go to work?

In the first instance, employers should make every effort to support working from home, including by providing suitable IT and equipment as they have been already. This will apply to many different types of businesses, particularly those who typically would have worked in offices or online.

Where work can only be done in the workplace, we have set out tailored guidelines for employers to help protect their workforce and customers from coronavirus while still continuing to trade or getting their business back up and running. We will be publishing even more detailed COVID-19 secure guidelines in the coming days, which has been developed in consultation with businesses and trades unions.

These ‘back to work’ guidelines apply to those in essential retail like:

- supermarkets
- those in construction and manufacturing
- those working in labs and research facilities
- those administering takeaways and deliveries at restaurants and cafes
- tradesmen, cleaners and others who work in people’s homes
- those who are facilitating trade or transport goods
- and so on

Non-essential retail, restaurants, pubs, bars, gyms and leisure centres will remain closed. They will reopen in a phased manner provided it is safe to do so.

There are specific guidelines for those who are vulnerable, shielding, or showing symptoms.

3.2 What is a critical worker?

Critical workers (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision) are those working in health and care and other essential services, who can still take their children to school or childcare and can use hotels and other accommodation services for work related purposes - for example if they can’t get home after a shift or need to isolate from their families. This critical worker definition does not affect whether or not you can travel to work – if you are not a critical worker, you may still travel to work provided if you cannot reasonably work from home.

3.3 What is meant by the phased approach?

Not all forms of work will return to normal at once. People will have to prepare for a new type of normal. We need to make sure that any changes we do make are carefully monitored and that we aren’t doing anything to increase the risk of infection and push the Reproductive value (R0) above 1. R0 describes how many people

on average will be infected for every one person who has COVID-19.

We will ensure that businesses have time to prepare their premises to operate as safely as possible.

We will set out more detail about the phasing in due course.

3.4 Will you open pubs / cinemas / hairdressers in July?

The roadmap (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy) sets out that some businesses (like pubs, cinemas or hairdressers) will not open until Step 3 is reached.

The government's current planning assumption is that this step will be no earlier than 4 July and subject to further detailed scientific advice, provided closer to the time, on how far we can go. When they do reopen, they should also meet the COVID-19 secure guidelines.

3.5 What are the 'Covid-Secure' safety guidelines workplaces have to be put in place?

We have set out clear, practical steps that businesses should take to ensure their workplaces are safe and give their staff the confidence to return back to work. We will be publishing even more detailed COVID-19 secure guidelines.

These include how to keep as many people as possible safely apart from those they do not live with in various workplace settings.

3.6 Do people need to wear face coverings at work?

Face coverings are not compulsory. However, if you can, people are advised to wear face coverings in enclosed public spaces where social distancing is not possible or where you are more likely to come into contact with people you do not normally meet. For example, on public transport or in some shops. Face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms.

A face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used as part of personal protective equipment by healthcare and other workers; these should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace such as health and care workers and those in industrial settings like those exposed to dust hazards.

3.7 Will a face covering stop me getting COVID-19?

The evidence suggests that face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms.

To protect yourself, you should continue to follow social distancing measures and isolation guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing) and wash your hands regularly.

4. Workers' rights

4.1 My employer is asking me to come to work but I'm scared.

Employers and staff should discuss and agree working arrangements.

Employers should make all efforts to help people to work from home where they can. But where work cannot be done at home, employers should take clear, practical steps to help protect workers and create safe places to work, such as shift working or staggering processes. To identify the precautions needed to manage risk,

your employer should discuss the workplace risk assessment with you to identify the practical ways of managing those risks.

If you remain concerned that your employer is not taking all practical steps to promote social distancing then you can report this to your local authority or the Health and Safety Executive who can take a range of action, including where appropriate requiring your employer to take additional steps.

We are publishing further specific “COVID-19 Secure” guidelines on how to make workplaces safe, which have been developed in consultation with over 200 business leaders and trades union organisations.

4.2 What if they try to fire me because I won’t go to work but cannot work at home?

We urge employers to take socially responsible decisions and listen to the concerns of their staff. Employers and employees should come to a pragmatic agreement about their working arrangements.

If individuals need advice, they should approach ACAS where they can get impartial advice about work disputes.

5. Public Transport

5.1 Who is allowed to travel on public transport?

If you cannot work from home and have to travel to work, or if you must make an essential journey, you should cycle or walk wherever possible. Before you travel on public transport, consider if your journey is necessary and if you can, stay local. Try to reduce your travel. This will help keep the transport network running and allows people who need to make essential journeys to travel.

We’ll be setting out further guidance for passengers with more advice on how to stay safe during your journeys later this week.

5.2 Should people wear face coverings on public transport?

If you can, wear a face covering in an enclosed space where social distancing isn’t possible and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet. This is most relevant for short periods indoors in crowded areas, for example on public transport or in some shops. The evidence suggests that face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are suffering from coronavirus, but not showing symptoms.

If people choose to wear them, we are asking people to make their own face coverings at home, using scarves or other textile items. We are publishing guidance to help illustrate the process (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering).

We urge the public not to purchase medical or surgical masks as these should be reserved for health and social care workers.

5.3 Can I use public transport to get to green spaces?

You should avoid using public transport wherever possible.

6. Schools and Childcare

6.1 Can children go back to early years settings, schools or university?

We initially urge those who are currently eligible to use school provision (children of critical workers and vulnerable children) to attend. As soon as it is safe to do so we will bring more year groups back to school in a phased way when it is safe to have larger numbers of children within schools, but not before. Keeping children and staff safe is our utmost priority.

Schools should prepare to begin opening for more children from 1 June. The government expects children to be able to return to early years settings, and for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 to be back in school in smaller class sizes from this point.

Secondary schools and further education colleges should also prepare to begin some face to face contact with Year 10 and 12 pupils who have key exams next year, in support of their continued remote, home learning.

The government's ambition is for all primary school children to return to school before the summer for a month if feasible.

6.2 How will you make sure it is safe?

Schools can now operate if they are organised in a way that is compatible with minimising the spread of the virus. The next phase of measures will require the development of new safety standards to set out how physical spaces, including schools, can be adapted to operate safely.

We will publish guidance advising schools on reopening to ensure schools can adequately prepare for the next phase. One of the main protective measures we can take to reduce transmission is to have small consistent group and class sizes.

6.3 Will children be compelled to wear face coverings at school?

No this will not be required. We will publish further advice on protective measures in schools in the coming weeks.

7. Borders / international visitors

Please note - these measures will NOT come into force on Wednesday 13 May. We will set out further detail, including from when these will be in force, in due course.

7.1 Are you isolating people at the border now?

The scientific advice shows that when domestic transmission is high, cases from abroad represent a small amount of the overall total and make no significant difference to the epidemic. Now that domestic transmission within the UK is coming under control, and other countries begin to lift lockdown measures, it is the right time to prepare new measures at the border.

7.2 What is self-isolation and which countries will it apply to?

We will be asking people travelling to the UK to make some sacrifices to stop coronavirus cases from being imported. In the same way as people in the UK have made large sacrifices to control the spread of coronavirus.

So what we will be asking people to do on entering the UK is supply their contact details and details of their accommodation, and to self-isolate in their accommodation for 14 days, other than those on a short list of exemptions.

We will set out further details shortly.

7.3 Is this for foreign travellers only or British people returning home from holiday or living overseas?

All arrivals including British nationals will be required to provide their contact information and self-isolate upon arrival, other than those on a short list of exemptions.

8. Enforcement

8.1 How will police enforce the new rules?

The police and local authorities have the powers to enforce the requirements set out in law (http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/129/contents/made) if people do not comply with them. The police will act with discretion and common sense in applying these measures, but if you breach the law, the police may instruct you to go home, leave an area or disperse, and they may instruct you to take steps to stop your children breaking these rules if they have already done so. The police can also take you home or arrest you where they believe it is necessary.

If the police believe that you have broken the law – or if you refuse to follow their instructions enforcing the law – a police officer may issue you with a fixed penalty notice of £100 (reduced to £50 if paid within 14 days), an increase of £40 from the previous £60 fixed penalty amount. If you have already received a fixed penalty notice, the amount for further offences will increase in line with the table below.

First offence	£100
Second offence	£200
Third offence	£400
Fourth offence	£800
Fifth offence	£1600
Maximum penalty	£3200

For both individuals and companies, if you do not pay your fine you could be taken to court, with magistrates able to impose unlimited fines.

9. Devolved administrations

9.1 Does this guidance apply across the UK?

This guidance applies in England – people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should follow the specific rules in those parts of the UK.

If you live in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland additional guidance is available:

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