



HM Government

Guidance

Meeting friends and family (COVID-19)

Advice on meeting friends and family safely.

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There is ongoing spread of COVID-19 in England and new Variants of Concern continue to be identified.

You should think about the risk of catching or passing on COVID-19 both to yourself and to others before meeting people you do not live with. While no situation is risk-free, you can take steps to make meeting family and friends safer. Vaccines reduce (but do not eliminate) the chances of catching COVID-19 and passing it on, and of serious illness. By following these steps, you can help to protect yourself, your loved ones and those in your community.

How COVID-19 is spread

It is possible to have COVID-19 with no symptoms. You can pass COVID-19 on to others even if you have only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. Around 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 do not show symptoms, so can spread the virus to others without knowing.

The main way of spreading COVID-19 is through close contact with an infected person. When someone with COVID-19 breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes, they release particles (droplets and aerosols) containing the virus that causes COVID-19. These particles can be breathed in by another person.

Surfaces and belongings can also be contaminated with COVID-19, when people who are infected cough or sneeze near them or if they touch them.

If you have COVID-19, there is a risk that you will spread the virus onto surfaces such as furniture, benches or door handles, even if you do not touch them directly. The next person to touch that surface may then become infected.

Minimising the risks when meeting friends and family

Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms, however mild, or a positive test result should stay at home and self-isolate immediately. This is because you could pass the infection on to others. You could be fined if you do not self-isolate following a notification by NHS Test and Trace. [Stay at home](#) for the full isolation period and do not invite visitors to your home or garden. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, arrange to have a [PCR test](#) if you have not already had one.

Currently, you can meet up to six people or one other household outdoors (a household includes a linked support bubble). From Step 3 – on 17 May – you will be able to meet up to 30 people outdoors, and up to six people or one other household indoors. [There are some exemptions](#). You must not interact with anyone outside of your own group (of 30 people outdoors or six people indoors).

Government guidance remains that you should stay 2 metres apart from anyone who is not in your household or support bubble where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings) if you cannot stay 2 metres apart. As we proceed down the roadmap and as vaccination protects more of the population, the emphasis will shift from government rules to personal responsibility. So instead of instructing you to stay 2m apart away from anyone you don't live with, you will be encouraged to exercise caution and consider the risks.

Step 3

A new COVID-19 variant is spreading in some parts of England. Wherever you can, keep 2 metres apart from people that you don't live with ([unless you have formed a support bubble](#) with them), including friends and family you don't live with. Meet others outside rather than inside wherever possible.

From 17 May, if you are meeting friends and family, you can make a personal choice on whether to keep your distance from them, but you should still be cautious. This advice applies to everyone, including people who are [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) and to pregnant women, apart from care home residents where separate guidance applies.

COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact (within 2 metres). The further away you can keep from other people, and the less time you spend in close contact with them, the less likely you are to catch COVID-19 and pass it on to others. Close contact, including hugging, increases the risk of spreading COVID-19.

There are actions you can take to reduce the chance of spreading COVID-19 and help keep you and your loved ones safe. This includes:

- **Meet outside** – When people are outside and physically distanced from each other, the particles containing the virus that causes COVID-19 are blown away which makes it less likely that they will be breathed in by another person.
- **If you do meet inside, make sure the space is well ventilated. Open windows and doors,** or take other action to let in plenty of fresh air. Bringing fresh air into a room and removing older stale air that may contain virus particles reduces the chance of spreading COVID-19. The more fresh air that is brought inside, the quicker any airborne virus will be removed from the room.
- **Take the vaccine when you are offered it, and encourage others to as well.** Vaccines reduce (but do not eliminate) the chances of catching COVID-19 and passing it on, and of serious illness. Consider whether you and your loved ones are vaccinated and whether there has been time for the vaccine to take effect before being in close contact.

- **Remember that some people are more vulnerable than others to being seriously ill from COVID-19.** The risks from COVID-19 and therefore of close contact are greater for some people than others, for example because they are clinically extremely vulnerable, pregnant or older. For example, you might choose not to have close contact with an elderly relative at this point, particularly if one or both of you are not vaccinated.
- **Minimise how many people you're in close contact with, and for how long.** The more people you are in close contact with – particularly if they are from different households – the higher the chances of you catching or passing on COVID-19. Longer periods of close contact increase the risk of transmission, but remember that even brief contact can spread COVID-19 and there is no such thing as a fully safe period of close contact.
- **Get tested twice a week**, even if you don't have symptoms. Around 1 in 3 people with coronavirus do not show symptoms, so can spread the virus to others without knowing. Testing regularly will help to reduce risk, particularly before meeting people from outside your household. You can order free home tests for you and your loved ones that give results in 30 minutes.

- **Wash hands and clean surfaces regularly to remove virus particles.**

You should always make space for other people to keep their distance if they want to.

Remember that you are not permitted to interact with anyone outside of your group of six (or two households) indoors, or outside of your group of 30 outdoors, unless an exemption applies.

In some settings, there will be specific guidance that you will need to follow even when you are with friends and family. This is important to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 to other people such as staff and other members of the public. You should always follow guidance associated with the setting you are in (for example in education, health, or care settings).

COVID-secure rules, including social distancing requirements, continue to apply in the workplace, and in businesses and public venues. This guidance does not affect a site owner's responsibility to calculate the number of people that can be accommodated with social distancing in place.