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Guidance

Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19

Guidance for living safely with respiratory infections, including coronavirus (COVID-19).

From: [UK Health Security Agency \(/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency\)](#)

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Applies to England

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As we learn to live safely with coronavirus (COVID-19), there are actions we can all take to help reduce the risk of catching COVID-19 and passing it on to others. These actions will also help to reduce the spread of other respiratory infections, such as flu, which can spread easily and may cause serious illness in some people.

COVID-19, along with many other respiratory infections such as influenza (flu), can spread easily and cause serious illness in some people. You may be infected with a respiratory virus such as COVID-19 and not have any symptoms but still pass infection onto others.

The risk of catching or passing on COVID-19 is greatest when someone who is infected is physically close to, or sharing an enclosed and/or poorly ventilated space with, other people. When someone with a respiratory viral infection such as COVID-19 breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes, they release small particles that contain the virus which causes the infection. These particles can be breathed in or can come into contact with the eyes, nose, or mouth. The particles can also land on surfaces and be passed from person to person via touch.

You will not always know whether someone you come into contact with is at [higher risk of becoming seriously ill from respiratory infections, including COVID-19](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#higher-risk) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#higher-risk>). They could be strangers (for example people you sit next to on public transport) or people you may have regular contact with (for example friends and work colleagues).

There are simple things you can do in your daily life

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Collection

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance](#) ([/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-](#)

that will help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections and protect those at highest risk. Things you can choose to do are:

1. Get vaccinated.
2. Let fresh air in if meeting others indoors.
3. Practise good hygiene:
 - wash your hands
 - cover your coughs and sneezes
 - clean your surroundings frequently
4. Wear a face covering or a face mask.

Face coverings and face masks can help reduce the chance of you spreading infection to others, especially in crowded and enclosed spaces, and may protect you from becoming infected by some respiratory viruses.

If you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as COVID-19, and you have a high temperature or do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, you are advised to try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people.

There is [guidance on steps you can take to protect other people if you are unwell with symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#what-to-do-if-you-have-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19-and-have-not-taken-a-covid-19-test) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19#what-to-do-if-you-have-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19-and-have-not-taken-a-covid-19-test>).

1. Get vaccinated

Vaccines are the best defence we have against COVID-19 and other respiratory infections such as flu. They provide good protection against hospitalisation and death. They also reduce the risk of long-term symptoms. The COVID-19 vaccines

[list-of-guidance](#))

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for local government \(/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-local-government\)](#)

are safe and effective and vaccine programmes are continuously monitored.

If you are eligible and you have not yet received your full course of a COVID-19 vaccine, you should [get vaccinated \(https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/). A full course of a COVID-19 vaccine provides protection against severe disease, including against the Omicron variant, but this protection wears off over time. Booster doses significantly improve the protection offered by vaccines. You should get a booster vaccine for COVID-19 if you are offered one.

You may be eligible for other vaccinations, particularly if you are at risk of becoming seriously ill. Get vaccinated as soon as you are able to.

There is [more information about the vaccinations available and when you should have them on the NHS website \(https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/).

2. Let fresh air in

The amount of respiratory virus in the air can build up in poorly ventilated areas. This increases the risk of spreading COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, especially if there are lots of infected people present. The virus can also remain in the air after an infected person has left.

Meeting outdoors greatly reduces this risk, but this may not always be possible.

Bringing fresh air into a room by opening a door or a window, even for a few minutes at a time, helps remove older stale air that could contain virus particles and reduces the chance of spreading infections. Trickle vents (small vents usually on the top of a window) or grilles can also be useful for bringing a little fresh air constantly. The more fresh air that is brought inside, the quicker any viruses

will be removed from the room.

Ventilation is most important if someone in your household has COVID-19 or another respiratory virus, to try and stop the virus spreading. [See further guidance here \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus/ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus/ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19).

Good ventilation has also been linked to health benefits such as better sleep and fewer sick days off from work or school.

There is further advice on [what you can do to improve ventilation \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus/ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus/ventilation-of-indoor-spaces-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19).

3. Remember the basics of good hygiene

Following these basic rules of good hygiene will help to protect you and others from COVID-19 as well as many other common infections:

- cover your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze
- wash your hands
- clean your surroundings

[GermDefence \(https://www.germdefence.org/\)](https://www.germdefence.org/) is a useful website that can help you identify ways to protect yourself and others in your household from COVID-19. It provides scientifically proven advice on reducing the risks from COVID-19 and other viruses in your home.

Cover your nose and mouth when you cough and sneeze

Coughing and sneezing increases the number of particles released by a person, the distance the particles travel and the time they stay in the air. If an infected person coughs or sneezes without covering their nose and mouth, it will significantly increase the risk of infecting others around them. By covering your nose and mouth, you will reduce the spread of particles carrying the virus.

Cover your mouth and nose with disposable tissues when you cough or sneeze. Put used tissues in a bin and immediately wash your hands or use hand sanitiser. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow, not into your hand.

Wash or sanitise your hands

Hands touch many surfaces and can become contaminated with viruses and other germs. Once contaminated, hands can transfer these to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the germs can enter your body and infect you.

Washing or sanitising your hands removes viruses and other germs, so you are less likely to become infected if you touch your face. Using soap and water is the most effective way to clean your hands, especially if they are visibly dirty. Hand sanitiser can be used when soap and water are not available. You should do this regularly throughout the day.

In addition, wash your hands:

- after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose
- before you eat or handle food
- after coming into contact with surfaces touched by many others, such as handrails, and shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms
- when returning home

Clean your surroundings

Surfaces and belongings can be contaminated with COVID-19 and other germs when people who are infected touch them or cough, talk or breathe over them. Cleaning surfaces will reduce the risk of you catching or spreading infections.

Clean surfaces in your home often. Pay particular attention to surfaces that are touched frequently, such as handles, light switches, work surfaces and electronic devices such as remote controls.

4. When to consider wearing a face covering or a face mask

Wearing a face covering or face mask can reduce the number of particles containing viruses that are released from the mouth and nose of someone who is infected with COVID-19 and other respiratory infections. Face coverings can also protect the person wearing the face covering from becoming infected by some viruses.

When to wear a face covering

- when you are coming into close contact with someone at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell from COVID-19 or other respiratory infections
- when COVID-19 rates are high and you will be in close contact with other people, such as in crowded and enclosed spaces
- when there are a lot of respiratory viruses circulating, such as in winter, and you will be in close contact with other people in crowded and enclosed spaces

If you have symptoms or have a positive COVID-19

test result and you need to leave your home, wearing a well-fitting face covering or a face mask can help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections. See further advice in the [guidance for people with symptoms of a respiratory infection or a positive test result](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-or-a-positive-test-result) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19>).

Those attending education or childcare settings will not normally be expected to wear a face covering. Face coverings for children under the age of 3 are not recommended for safety reasons.

What makes a good face covering

Face coverings work best if they are made with multiple layers (at least 2 and preferably 3) and form a good fit around the nose and mouth. A wire nose bridge can improve the fit and may also help to prevent glasses from fogging. Scarves, bandanas or religious garments are likely to be less effective if they do not fit securely around the mouth and nose, and are of a single layer.

Reusable face coverings should be able to be washed with other items of laundry according to fabric washing instructions and dried without causing the face covering to be damaged. Single-use disposable masks should not be washed or reused and should be disposed of responsibly.

Easy read

[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(easy read\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads)
(<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads>

[/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1083515/20220608_Easy_Read_Living_Safely_with_Respiratory_Illnesses.pdf](#)

PDF, 1.18 MB, 12 pages

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Translations

[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Arabic\)](#)

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1068751/20220412-Living_safely_with_respiratory_-_Arabic.pdf) (PDF, 161 KB, 6 pages)

[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Bengali\)](#)

(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1068752/20220412-Living_safely_with_respiratory_-_Bengali.pdf) (PDF, 186 KB, 7 pages)

[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Chinese Simplified\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Chinese Traditional\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Farsi\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Gujarati\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Pashto\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Polish\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Portuguese\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Punjabi Gurmukhi\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Punjabi Shahmukhi\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Russian\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Slovak\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Tamil\)](#)

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[Living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19 \(Ukrainian\)](#)

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