



# COVID-19: Information for the public

## If you have symptoms you can get tested for COVID-19

- Everyone must help stop coronavirus spreading.
- If you go outside stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people.
- Groups of up to 30 people who do not share a household can meet outdoors, maintaining social distancing.
- Groups of up to 6 people who do not share a household can meet indoors, maintaining social distancing.
- Avoid touching your face and wash your hands as soon as you get home.
- You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.
- A covid-19 symptom checker is available here.

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## Public information downloads

COVID-19 is a new illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It's caused by a type of virus called coronavirus. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and save lives, everyone should be trying to follow **social distancing measures** as much as possible.

In this section you can find the latest information on COVID-19, including looking after yourself physically and mentally. You can also find specific guidance for different groups of people, businesses and HSC staff.

**From Sunday 19 April the Department of Health will be releasing the daily statistics on coronavirus (COVID-19) which will be available at [www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)**

**The daily update from the Department of Health replaces the Daily Bulletin published by the PHA up to 19 April 2020.**

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## Preventing the spread of infection

Like seasonal flu, the same public health advice applies for COVID-19: if you cough or sneeze, use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose, throw it away carefully after use, and wash your hands.

The best way to prevent the spread of infections, including COVID-19, is good personal hygiene. This means washing your hands well and often, using soap and water and drying them with paper towels.



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## What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

If you have:

- a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature); OR

- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual);  
OR
- a loss of or change in sense of smell or taste.

**Everyone you live with must stay at home. You should arrange a test for COVID-19 [here](#).**

You can ring NHS 111 for information or advice and they will help you decide if you need to contact your GP. Calling your GP may be necessary if you have:

- an existing health condition;
- problems with your immune system;
- you feel you are not coping with your symptoms.

Do **not** attend your GP surgery or emergency department in person before calling ahead and speaking with someone.

If you have very serious symptoms or feel it is a medical emergency and you need to call an ambulance, dial 999 and inform the operator of your symptoms.

**While waiting for your test or if you receive a positive diagnosis for COVID-19:**

- you'll need to stay at home for at least 10 days from when your symptoms started;
- **after 10 days** from when your symptoms started:
  - if you **have not had a high temperature for 48 hours**, you no longer need to self-isolate;
  - if you **still have a high temperature**, you need to self-isolate until your temperature has returned to normal for 48 hours.
- you do not need to self-isolate if you only have a cough or loss of sense of smell/taste after 7 days, as these symptoms can last for several weeks after the infection has gone.
- if you live with someone who has symptoms, you'll need to stay at home and self-isolate also. If the person with symptoms tests positive for COVID-19, everyone in the household without symptoms will need to self-isolate for 14 days from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms;
- however, if you develop symptoms during this 14-day period, you'll need to stay at home for at least 10 days from the day your symptoms started (regardless of what day you are on in the original 14-day period). Follow the advice above on when to end self-isolation.

**If you receive a negative diagnosis for COVID-19:**

You can stop self-isolating if you have a negative test, as long as:

everyone you live with who has symptoms of COVID-19 has tested negative – you need to keep self-isolating if someone in your household tests positive, or develops symptoms of COVID-19 and has not been tested;

you feel well enough, and have not had a raised temperature for more than 48 hours.

If you develop new or worsening symptoms, you should self-isolate and can arrange to be re-tested.

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## Coronavirus Monthly Epidemiological Bulletin

The latest monthly epidemiological bulletin can be found [here](#)

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## Further advice by category:

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### Meeting outdoors

Up to 30 people who are not from the same household can meet outdoors but you should maintain social distancing by being at least 2 metres apart.

Social distancing is essential to prevent further waves of the epidemic. You should avoid visiting places such as seaside resorts and popular beauty spots whenever there is a chance that large numbers of people will converge and crowds will form.

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### Indoor visits

Indoor meetings of up to six people can take place.

Meeting friends and family indoors carries a higher risk than meeting outdoors. If possible, you should continue to arrange meetings with family and friends outdoors.

If you decide to meet indoors you should do so as safely as possible and follow public health advice by:

- limiting the duration of visits
- ensuring good ventilation
- maintaining good hand hygiene
- practicing social distancing where possible

The use of a face covering is also strongly advised.

Overnight stays are not permitted and those who are medically shielding are strongly advised to continue following the advice that remains in place for that group until the shielding period is paused on 31 July.

This easement makes provision for informal childcare arrangements between families and friends to resume.

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## Support 'bubbles' for single occupancy households

People who live alone are permitted to visit one other household indoors to form a small support unit (a 'bubble').

The bubble would therefore contain two households forming a single unit, that is the person living on their own and members of the other household, where social distancing between them would no longer be required.

This enables the person who lives alone to visit, stay over and spend more time with the second household. The second household can be of any size.

To contain the risk of spreading the virus, a household cannot be part of more than one bubble. Therefore members of the two households within a bubble will not be permitted to visit or have visitors from a third household. They should maintain social distancing from people outside of their bubble.

If anyone within your bubble develops symptoms, all members of the bubble should self-isolate. Particular care needs to be taken if any member is regarded as a vulnerable person in terms of the virus.

People who are in the shielding group are strongly advised not to avail of this easement. If the risk remains low, those who are shielding alone can also form a support bubble with one other household, indoors, in the same way as outlined above.

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## Face coverings

The use of face coverings on public transport is mandatory. Further information on the use of face coverings and the exemptions that will apply is available at:

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/coronavirus-safer-travel-guidance](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/coronavirus-safer-travel-guidance) and [www.nidirect.gov.uk/face-coverings](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/face-coverings)

It is strongly advised that you should think about using face coverings in particular circumstances - short periods in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not possible.

Crucially, do not get a false sense of security about the level of protection provided by wearing a face covering. It is essential that everyone continues to:

practise social distancing as much as humanly possible  
wash their hands thoroughly throughout the day  
'catch it, kill it, bin it' when they sneeze or cough

That's still the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

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## Looking after yourself and your family

Staying at home more will affect our usual social activities. It's very important that we look after our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Based on the Take 5 steps to wellbeing, this leaflet offers tips on supporting your mental and emotional wellbeing during the current coronavirus outbreak.

It's important that children continue to be active, this fun physical activity record sheet outlines the recommended physical activity guidelines for children aged 5 to 18 and includes an easy way for children to keep track of how much physical activity they are getting.

Information on RISE NI (Regional Integrated Support for Education NI), which supports children during the COVID-19 pandemic by working closely with parents and school staff to help children develop the foundation skills for learning, can be found [here](#).

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## Testing

If you have symptoms you should be tested for COVID-19. Information on testing can be found [here](#).

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## Contact tracing

If you receive a positive test result you will be contacted by the PHA's Contact Tracing Service from (028) 9536 8888.

If you do not answer the call the first time, the team will try another four times to get in contact with you – this is because it is really important that we speak to you. The reason for this call is to help us identify anyone you have been in close contact with who may be a risk of getting COVID-19, so we can offer them support and guidance on self-isolation and the need to get tested if they develop symptoms.

Close contacts will be contacted by the team using the same (028) 9536 8888 number.

Information on testing can be found [here](#).

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## NHS COVID-19 vaccine research registry

The NHS COVID-19 vaccine registry allows members of the public to register their interest and be contacted to participate in clinical studies.

You can sign up to give permission for researchers to contact you about taking part in COVID-19 vaccine studies. By collecting details about people who are interested in taking part in vaccine studies, the service will help cut down the time it takes to find volunteers for vaccine studies. This will help us to carry out studies and find a vaccine faster.

You can sign up if you are 18 or over, and live in the UK.

You are not signing up to take part in a specific health study when you use this service. You are letting researchers know you're happy for them to contact you if they think you might be suitable to take part in their studies.

[Sign up to be contacted about coronavirus vaccine research](#)

[Your NHS needs you posters](#)

More information about taking part in research and other opportunities to take part in COVID-19 research can be found at [www.bepartofresearch.uk](http://www.bepartofresearch.uk)

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## Travel

The Public Health Agency (PHA) does not issue travel advice. If you're concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on your existing travel plans, check with your airline, tour operator, cruise line or other transport and accommodation providers as applicable. People who plan to travel should check the travel advice [\*\*here\*\*](#).

On Monday 8 June, new rules for entering or returning to the UK became law, you can find out more [\*\*here\*\*](#).

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## Older people and people with an underlying health condition

For the latest advice for older people and people with an underlying health condition click [here](#).

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## Advice for blind and partially sighted people

This [document](#) highlights some key contact numbers and advice on how to get support in your local community.

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## People with a hearing impairment or who are deaf

A number of resources on COVID-19 in British and Irish Sign Language are available:

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

To access these videos please see:

British Sign Language [pha.site/StayHomeGuidanceBSL](https://pha.site/StayHomeGuidanceBSL)

Irish Sign Language [pha.site/StayHomeGuidanceISL](https://pha.site/StayHomeGuidanceISL)

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### **Health and Social Care remote sign language interpreting service**

A free remote interpreting service for British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) users in Northern Ireland has been introduced to provide the Deaf community with access to NHS111 and all health and social care services during the COVID-19 pandemic. This temporary service is provided by Interpreter Now.

- To watch a BSL video that explains more about this service and how to access it, [click here](#).
- To watch an ISL video that explains more about this service and how to access it, [click here](#).

**To contact [NHS111](#), please visit:** [www.interpreternow.co.uk/nhs111ni](http://www.interpreternow.co.uk/nhs111ni)

This part of the service is a **Video Relay System** that enables Deaf people to telephone NHS111 via a remote BSL or ISL interpreter.

### **How it works:**

The Deaf person contacts the interpreter via the Interpreter Now app, using their smartphone or tablet, or via the secure video link using a computer. Once they are connected, the interpreter telephones NHS111 on the Deaf person's behalf.

**To contact all other Health and Social Care services including your local GP, please visit:**

[www.interpreternow.co.uk/hscni](http://www.interpreternow.co.uk/hscni)

It can be used to contact

- Northern Ireland GPs and GP Out of Hours Services
- Hospitals for inpatient or outpatient queries (including independent / private hospitals)
- All health services – e.g. a dentist, optician, optometrist, community pharmacy, etc.
- All social care services – e.g. a social work team, day centre, residential or nursing home (including independent / private care facilities commissioned by HSC), etc.
- Ambulance services
- The Northern Ireland COVID19 Community Helpline: **0808 802 0020**

This part of the service includes two elements:

**A Video Relay System:** This enables Deaf people to telephone a Health and Social Care service provider via a remote BSL or ISL interpreter.

#### **How it works:**

The Deaf person, the interpreter, and the Health and Social Care service provider can all be in different locations. The Deaf person contacts the interpreter via the Interpreter Now app, using their smartphone or tablet, or via the secure video link using a computer. Once they are connected, the interpreter telephones the Health and Social Care service provider on the Deaf person's behalf.

**Video Remote Interpreting:** This enables Deaf people to communicate with a Health and Social Care professional in person, via an online BSL or ISL video interpreter.

#### **How it works:**

The Deaf person and the Health and Social Care service provider are together in the same location, while the interpreter is online via secure video link on a screen (e.g. a tablet, smart phone, or computer).

To ensure immediate access to telephone services at this time the Video Relay System will be introduced first.

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## Looking after your wellbeing while staying at home

More information on this can be found here. To access these videos please see:

British Sign Language [pha.site/mental-health-wellbeing-bsl-vimeo](https://pha.site/mental-health-wellbeing-bsl-vimeo)

Irish Sign Language [pha.site/mental-health-wellbeing-isl-vimeo](https://pha.site/mental-health-wellbeing-isl-vimeo)

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## Pregnancy

You can find advice for pregnant women and parents at [www.ni-maternity.com](http://www.ni-maternity.com) or by clicking here. HSC staff who are pregnant can get more advice here.

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## People with a learning disability

For the latest PHA advice for people with a learning disability click here. Advice from Mencap and other organisations can be found here.

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## Screening

Some population screening programmes in Northern Ireland have been paused for the time being. This decision has been made, in agreement with the Health Minister, so that Health and Social Care (HSC) staff and resources can be redeployed in response to COVID-19 and to reduce the risk of exposure to the corona virus for the public and HSC staff.

For more information on screening, see here.

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## Bereavement

This video has been made by the Psychological Services team at Belfast Health and Social Care Trust for parents and children who have lost a loved one due to COVID-19. It aims to help parents support their child to understand the loss and say goodbye when the usual traditions and funeral practices cannot take place. It is accompanied by a workbook, which is available (along with advice and practical guidance on grief and bereavement for adults) [here](#).

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## Public information downloads

Further resources including posters for download and printing are available [here](#).



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Print

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**Guidance for HSC staff, healthcare workers and care providers**

**Understanding COVID-19: Viewpoints**

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