

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

Updated 16 March 2020

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild illness.

Main messages

- if you live alone and you have symptoms of coronavirus illness (COVID-19), however mild, stay at home for **7 days** from when your symptoms started. (See [ending isolation](#) section below for more information)
- if you live with others and you or one of them have symptoms of coronavirus, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for **14 days**. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill
- it is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community
- for anyone in the household who starts displaying symptoms, they need to stay at home for 7 days from when the symptoms appeared, regardless of what day they are on in the original 14 day isolation period. (See [ending isolation](#) section below for more information)
- if you can, move any vulnerable individuals (such as the elderly and those with underlying health conditions) out of your home, to stay with friends or family for the duration of the home isolation period
- if you cannot move vulnerable people out of your home, stay away from them as much as possible
- if you have coronavirus symptoms:
 - do **not** go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital
 - you do not need to contact 111 to tell them you're staying at home
 - testing for coronavirus is not needed if you're staying at home
- plan ahead and ask others for help to ensure that you can successfully stay at home and consider what can be done for vulnerable people in the household
- ask your employer, friends and family to help you to get the things you need to stay at home
- wash your hands regularly for 20 seconds, each time using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser
- if you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days, then use the [NHS 111 online](#) coronavirus service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999

Who this guidance is for

This advice is intended for:

- people with symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus, and do not require hospital treatment, who must remain at home until they are well
- those living in households with someone who shows symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus

Things to help you prepare now

Make a plan for your household or family

The best thing you can do now is plan for how you can adapt your daily routine, and that of others in your household, to be able to follow this advice. Some of the ways in which you could prepare include:

- talk to your neighbours and family and exchange phone numbers of household contacts
- consider and plan for those in your home who are considered vulnerable
- create a contact list with phone numbers of neighbours, schools, employer, chemist, NHS 111
- set up online shopping accounts if possible

Why staying at home is very important

It is very important that individuals with symptoms that may be due to coronavirus and their household members stay at home. Staying at home will help control the spread of the virus to friends, the wider community, and particularly the most vulnerable.

If you live with others and you or one of them have symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus, then household members must stay at home and not leave your house for 14 days (see [ending self-isolation](#) below). If possible, you should not go out even to buy food or other essentials, other than exercise, and in that case at a safe distance from others. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in your house became ill.

If not possible, then you should do what you can to limit your social contact when you leave the house to get supplies.

It is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or may already be infected. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

Staying at home may be difficult and frustrating, but there are things that you can do to help make it easier. These include:

- plan ahead and think about what you will need in order to be able to stay at home for the full 7 or 14 days
- talk to your employer, friends and family to ask for their help to access the things you will need to make your stay at home a success
- think about and plan how you can get access to food and other supplies such as medications that you will need during this period
- ask friends or family to drop off anything you need or order supplies online, but make sure these are left outside your home for you to collect
- make sure that you keep in touch with friends and family over the phone or through social media
- think about things you can do during your time at home. People who have successfully completed a period of staying at home have kept themselves busy with activities such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films
- many people find it helpful to plan out the full 14 days, such as on a make-shift calendar. You may also find it helpful to plan in advance what you will do if, for example, someone in the household were to feel much worse, such as have difficulties breathing
- when you are feeling better, 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

While you are staying at home, make sure you do the following things

Stay at home

You and all household members should remain at home. **Do not go to work, school, or public areas, and do not use public transport or taxis.**

If possible, you should not go out even to buy food or other essentials, other than exercise, and in that case at a safe distance from others. The 14-day period starts from the day the first person in your house became ill.

If you require help with buying groceries, other shopping or picking up medication, or walking a dog, you will need to ask friends or relatives. Alternatively, you can order medication by phone or online. You can also order your shopping online. Make sure you tell delivery drivers to leave items outside for collection if you order online. The delivery driver should not come into your home.

If you are an employee and unable to work due to coronavirus, please refer to this [guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions](#) to find out about the support that is available to you.

If you are living with children

Keep following this advice to the best of your ability, however, we are aware that not all these measures will be possible.

What we have seen so far is that children with coronavirus appear to be less severely affected. It is nevertheless important to do your best to follow this guidance.

If you have a vulnerable person living with you

Minimise as much as possible the time any vulnerable family members spend in shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas, and keep shared spaces well ventilated.

Aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from vulnerable people you live with and encourage them to sleep in a different bed where possible. If they can, they should use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household. Make sure they use separate towels from the other people in your house, both for drying themselves after bathing or showering and for hand-hygiene purposes.

If you do share a toilet and bathroom with a vulnerable person, it is important that you clean them every time you use them (for example, wiping surfaces you have come into contact with). Another tip is to consider drawing up a rota for bathing, with the vulnerable person using the facilities first.

If you share a kitchen with a vulnerable person, avoid using it while they are present. If they can, they should take their meals back to their room to eat. If you have one, use a dishwasher to clean and dry the family's used crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them using your usual washing up liquid and warm water and dry them thoroughly. If the vulnerable person is using their own utensils, remember to use a separate tea towel for drying these.

We understand that it will be difficult for some people to separate themselves from others at home. You should do your very best to follow this guidance and everyone in your household should regularly wash their hands, avoid touching their face, and clean frequently touched surfaces.

If you are breastfeeding while infected

There is currently no evidence to suggest that the virus can be transmitted through breast milk. Infection can be spread to the baby in the same way as to anyone in close contact with you. The current evidence is that children with coronavirus get much less severe symptoms than adults. 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 and can be discussed with your midwife, health visitor or GP by telephone.

If you or a family member are feeding with formula or expressed milk, you should sterilise the equipment carefully before each use. You should not share bottles or a breast pump with someone else.

You can find more information at the [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists website](#).

Cleaning and disposal of waste

When cleaning you should use your usual household products, like detergents and bleach, as these will be very effective at getting rid of the virus on surfaces. Clean frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, handrails, remote controls and table tops. This is particularly important if you have an older or vulnerable person in the house.

Personal waste (such as used tissues) and disposable cleaning cloths can be stored securely within disposable rubbish bags. These bags should be placed into another bag, tied securely and kept separate from other waste. This should be 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.

Laundry

To minimise the possibility of dispersing virus through the air, do not shake dirty laundry.

Wash items as appropriate 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 7-day (for individual isolation) or 14-day isolation period (for households) has ended when you can then take the laundry to a public launderette.

What you can do to help yourself get better

Drink water to keep yourself hydrated; you should drink enough during the day so your urine (pee) is a pale clear colour. You can use over-the-counter medications, such as paracetamol, to help with some of your symptoms. Use these according to the instructions on the packet or label and do not exceed the recommended dose.

If you or your family need to seek medical advice

Seek prompt medical attention if your illness or the illness in any household members is worsening. If it's not an emergency, contact NHS 111 online at 111.nhs.uk. If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. If it is an emergency and you need to call an ambulance, dial 999 and inform the call handler or operator that you or your relative have coronavirus symptoms.

All routine medical and dental appointments should usually be cancelled whilst you and the family are staying at home. If you are concerned or have been asked to attend in person within the period you are home isolating, discuss this with your medical contact first (for example, your GP, local hospital or outpatient service), using the number they have provided. If your concerns are related to your coronavirus symptoms contact [NHS 111 online](https://111.nhs.uk). If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111.

Wash your hands often

Clean your hands frequently each day by washing with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser. This will help protect you and the people you live with. This step is one of the most effective ways of reducing the risk of passing infection to others.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

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

If you have a carer, they should use disposable tissues to wipe away any mucus or phlegm after you have sneezed or coughed. Then they should wash their hands with soap and water.

Dispose of tissues into a disposable rubbish bag and immediately wash your hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser.

Facemasks

We do not recommend the use of facemasks as an effective means of preventing the spread of infection. Facemasks play an important role in clinical settings, such as hospitals, but there's very little evidence of benefit from their use outside of these settings.

Do not have visitors in your home

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

If you or a family member receive essential care in your home, then carers should continue to visit. Carers will be provided with facemasks and gloves to reduce the risk of you passing on the infection.

If you have pets in the household

At present, there is no evidence that companion animals/pets such as dogs and cats can be infected with coronavirus.

Looking after your wellbeing whilst staying at home

We know that staying at home for a prolonged period can be difficult, frustrating and lonely for some people and that you or other household members may feel low. It can be particularly challenging if you don't have much space or access to a garden.

It's important to remember to take care of your mind as well as your body and to get support if you need it. Stay in touch with family and friends over the phone or on social media. There are also sources of support and information that can help, such as the [Every Mind Matters website](#).

Think about things you can do during your time at home. People who have not minded staying at home for a week have kept themselves busy with activities such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films. If you feel well enough you can take part in light exercise within your home or garden.

Many people find it helpful to remind themselves why what they are doing is so important. Hopefully, none of your family will suffer more than flu-like symptoms. But some people are badly affected by coronavirus, and particularly the elderly and those with certain medical conditions. By staying home, you are protecting the lives of others, as well as making sure the NHS does not get overwhelmed.

Ending self-isolation and household-isolation

If you have been symptomatic, then you may end your self-isolation after 7 days. The 7-day period starts from the day when you first became ill

If living with others, then all household members who remain well may end household-isolation after 14 days. The 14-day period starts from the day illness began in the first person to become ill. Fourteen days is the incubation period for coronavirus; people who remain well after 14 days are unlikely to be infectious.

Should a household member develop coronavirus symptoms late in the 14-day household-isolation period (eg on day 13 or day 14) **the isolation period does not need to be extended, but the person with the new symptoms has to stay at home for 7 days**. The 14-day household-isolation period will have greatly reduced the overall amount of infection the rest of the household could pass on, and it is not necessary to re-start 14 days of isolation for the whole household. This will have provided a high level of community protection. Further isolation of members of this household will provide very little additional community protection.

At the end of the 14-day period, any family member who has not become unwell can leave household isolation.

If any ill person in the household has not had any signs of improvement and have not already sought medical advice, they should contact [NHS 111 online](#). If your home has no internet access, you should call NHS 111.