

Tier 4: Stay at Home

What you can and cannot do in areas with a very rapidly rising level of infections, where tighter restrictions are in place from 20 December.

Published 19 December 2020

From: [Department of Health and Social Care](#)

Applies to: England (see guidance for [Wales](#))

If you live in a Tier 4 area, you must follow the rules below from Sunday 20 December. This means that you cannot meet other people indoors, including over the Christmas period, unless you live with them, or they are part of your existing support bubble. Outdoors, you can only meet one person from another household. These rules will not be relaxed for Christmas.

Hands. Face. Space

1 in 3 people who have coronavirus have no symptoms and will be spreading it without realising it.

Remember - 'Hands. Face. Space.'

- hands – wash your hands regularly and for 20 seconds
- face – wear a face covering in indoor settings where social distancing may be difficult, and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet
- space – stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings)

When meeting people you do not live with, it is important to do so outdoors where possible. If you meet people you do not live with indoors, such as someone working in your home, you should make sure you let as much fresh air in as you can (for example by opening windows). Follow the [guidance on meeting others safely](#).

Stay at home

You must not leave or be outside of your home except for where you have a specific purpose, or a 'reasonable excuse'. A reasonable excuse includes:

Work and volunteering

You can leave home for work purposes, where your place of work remains open and where you cannot work from home (including if your job involves working in other people's homes).

Essential activities

You can leave home to buy things at shops which are permitted to open in your area, but you should stay local. For instance you can leave home to buy food or medicine, or to collect any items - including food or drink - ordered through click-and-collect or as a takeaway, to obtain or deposit money (e.g. from a bank or post office), or to access critical public services (see section below).

Fulfilling legal obligations

You may also leave home to fulfil legal obligations, or to carry out activities related to buying, selling, letting or renting a residential property, or vote in certain elections taking place overseas.

Education and childcare

You can leave home for education (formal provision, rather than extracurricular classes such as music or drama tuition, or out of school settings) or training, registered childcare and supervised activities for children that are necessary to allow parents/carers to work, seek work, undertake education or training, or attend a medical appointment. Parents can still take their children to school, and people can continue existing arrangements for contact between parents and children where they live apart. This includes [childcare bubbles](#).

Meeting others and care

1 in 3 people who have coronavirus have no symptoms and will be spreading it without realising it.

You can leave home to visit people in your [support bubble](#), or to provide informal childcare for children aged 13 and under as part of a [childcare bubble](#), to provide care for vulnerable people, to provide emergency assistance, attend a support group (of up to 15 people), or for respite care where that care is being provided to a vulnerable person or a person with a disability, or is a short break in respect of a looked after child.

Exercise and recreation

People can also exercise outdoors or visit some public outdoor places, such as parks, the countryside, public gardens or outdoor sports facilities. You can continue to do unlimited exercise alone, or in a public outdoor place with your household, support bubble, or one other person.

Medical reasons, harm and compassionate visits

You can leave home for any medical reason, including to get a COVID-19 test, for medical appointments and emergencies, to be with someone who is giving birth, to avoid injury or illness or to escape risk of harm (such as domestic abuse), or for animal welfare reasons – such as to attend veterinary services for advice or treatment.

You can also leave home to visit someone who is dying or someone in a care home (if permitted under care home guidance), hospice, or hospital, or to accompany them to a medical appointment.

Communal worship and life events

You can leave home to attend a place of worship for communal worship, a funeral or a related event for someone who has died, or to visit a burial ground or a remembrance garden, or to attend a wedding - but funerals, linked events and weddings are all subject to limits on the numbers that can attend (see below).

Meeting others safely

In general, you must not meet with another person socially or undertake any activities with another person. However, you can exercise or meet in a public outdoor place with people you live with, your support bubble (or as part of a childcare bubble), or with one other person.

You should minimise time spent outside your home. When around other people, stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household - meaning the people you live with - or your [support bubble](#). Where this is not possible, stay 1 metre apart with extra precautions (e.g. wearing a face covering).

You must not meet socially indoors with family or friends unless they are part of your household or support bubble.

You can exercise or visit a public outdoor place

- by yourself
- with the people you live with,
- with your support bubble,
- or, when on your own, with 1 person from another household.

Children under 5, and up to two carers for a person with a disability who needs continuous care are **not** counted towards the outdoors gatherings limit.

Public outdoor places include:

- parks, beaches, countryside accessible to the public, forests
- public gardens (whether or not you pay to enter them)
- allotments
- the grounds of a heritage site
- outdoor sports courts and facilities
- playgrounds

You cannot meet people in a private garden, unless you live with them or have formed a support bubble with them.

You must wear a face covering in many indoor settings, such as shops or places of worship where these remain open, and on public transport, unless you are exempt. This is the law. [Read guidance on face coverings.](#)

Support and childcare bubbles

There is separate guidance for [support bubbles](#) and [childcare bubbles](#) across all tiers. You can form a support bubble with another household if any of the following apply to you:

- you are the only adult in your household (any other members of the household having been under 18 on 12 June 2020), or are an under 18 year old living without any adults
- you live with someone with a disability who requires continuous care and there is no other adult living in the household
- you live with a child under 1, or who was under 1 on 2 December 2020
- you live with a child under 5, or who was under 5 on 2 December 2020, with a disability

You may need to change your support bubble if your circumstances change. Find out more about [changing your support bubble.](#)

Where and when you can meet in larger groups

There are still circumstances in which you are allowed to meet others from outside your household or support bubble in larger groups, but this should not be for socialising and only for permitted purposes. A full list of these circumstances will be included in the regulations, and includes:

- for work, or providing voluntary or charitable services. This includes picketing outside workplaces. This can include work in other people's homes where necessary - for example, for nannies, cleaners or tradespeople. See guidance on [working safely in other people's homes](#)). Where a work meeting does not need to take place in a private home or garden, it should not - for example, although you can meet a personal trainer, you should do so in a public outdoor public place.
- in a [childcare bubble](#)(for the purposes of childcare only)
- for registered childcare, or for supervised activities for children where this enables a parent to work, seek work, attend education or training, or for respite care
- education or training - meaning education related to a formal curriculum or training that relates to work or obtaining work
- for arrangements where children do not live in the same household as both their parents or guardians
- to allow contact between birth parents and children in care, as well as between siblings in care
- for prospective adopting parents to meet a child or children who may be placed with them
- for birth partners
- to provide emergency assistance, and to avoid injury or illness, or to escape a risk of harm
- to see someone who is dying

- to fulfil a legal obligation, such as attending court or jury service
- for gatherings within criminal justice accommodation or immigration detention centres
- to [provide care or assistance to someone vulnerable](#), or to provide respite for a carer
- for a wedding or equivalent ceremony in exceptional circumstances, as set out below.
- for funerals - up to a maximum of 30 people. Wakes and other linked ceremonial events can continue in a group of up to 6.
- to visit someone at home who is dying, or to visit someone receiving treatment in a hospital, hospice or care home, or to accompany a family member or friend to a medical appointment
- for elite sportspeople (and their coaches if necessary, or parents/guardians if they are under 18) to compete and train
- to facilitate a house move

Support groups that have to be delivered in person can continue with up to 15 participants where formally organised to provide mutual aid, therapy or any other form of support - but they must take place at a premises other than a private home. This includes, but is not limited to, support to victims of crime, people in drug and alcohol recovery, new parents and guardians, people caring for those with long-term or terminal illnesses, or who are vulnerable, people facing issues relating to their sexuality or gender, those who have suffered bereavement, and vulnerable young people, including for them to meet youth workers.

Parent and child groups can continue where they provide support to parent and/or child, and children under 5 will not be counted within the 15 person limit - meaning parents and carers can attend such groups in larger numbers. These cannot take place in private dwellings.

Where a group includes someone covered by an exception (for example, someone who is working or volunteering), they are not generally counted as part of the gatherings limit. This means, for example, a tradesperson can go into a household without breaching the limit, if they are there for work, and the officiant at a wedding would not count towards the limit.

If you break the rules

The police can take action against you if you meet in larger groups. This includes breaking up illegal gatherings and issuing fines (fixed penalty notices).

You can be given a Fixed Penalty Notice of £200 for the first offence, doubling for further offences up to a maximum of £6,400. If you hold, or are involved in holding, an illegal gathering of over 30 people, the police can issue fines of £10,000.

Keeping you and your friends and family safe

When meeting friends and family you should also:

- follow [guidance on social distancing and letting in fresh air](#)
- limit how many different people you see socially over any period of time

Protecting people more at risk from coronavirus

If you are clinically vulnerable, you could be at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. You:

- should be especially careful to follow the rules and minimise your contacts with others
- should continue to wash your hands carefully and more frequently than usual and maintain thorough cleaning of frequently touched areas in your home and/or workspace

Clinically vulnerable people are those who are:

- aged 70 or over (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab each year on medical grounds):
 - chronic (long-term) mild to moderate respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
 - chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
 - chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy
 - diabetes
 - problems with the spleen
 - a weakened immune system as the result of certain conditions or medicines they are taking (such as steroid tablets)
 - being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
- pregnant

There is a further group of people who are defined, also on medical grounds, as [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) to coronavirus – that is, people with specific serious health conditions. Over this period, we are advising the clinically extremely vulnerable to work from home. If you cannot work from home, you are advised not to go to work and may be eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS), Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit. We are advising clinically extremely vulnerable people to stay at home as much as possible, except to go outdoors for exercise or to attend health appointments. You may wish to meet up with one other person from outside your household or support bubble, for example, to exercise in an outdoor public place, but we suggest that you always try to do so as safely as possible. [Please follow the guidance set out in the shielding section of the CEV guidance.](#)

Travel

Travelling within a tier 4 area

If you live in a tier 4 area, you must stay at home. You must not leave your home to travel unless for work, education or other legally permitted reasons. If you need to travel you should stay local

- meaning avoiding travelling outside of your village, town or the part of a city where you live - and look to reduce the number of journeys you make overall. The list of reasons you can leave your home and area include, but are not limited to:

- work, where you cannot work from home
- accessing education and for caring responsibilities
- visiting those in your support bubble - or your childcare bubble for childcare
- visiting hospital, GP and other medical appointments or visits where you have had an accident or are concerned about your health
- buying goods or services from premises that are open in Tier 4 areas, including essential retail, but these should be within your local area wherever possible
- spending time or exercising outdoors. This should be done locally wherever possible, but you can travel a short distance within your Tier 4 area to do so if necessary (for example, to access an open space)
- attending the care and exercise of a pet, or veterinary services

If you need to travel, walk or cycle where possible, and plan ahead and avoid busy times and routes on public transport. This will allow you to practise social distancing while you travel.

Avoid car sharing with anyone from outside your household or your support bubble. See the [guidance on car sharing](#).

If you need to use public transport, you should follow the [safer travel guidance](#).

Travelling out of a tier 4 area

You must stay at home and not leave your Tier 4 area, other than for legally permitted reasons such as:

- travel to work where you cannot work from home
- travel to education and for caring responsibilities
- visit those in your support bubble - or your childcare bubble for childcare
- attend hospital, GP and other medical appointments or visits where you have had an accident or are concerned about your health

The full list of exceptions will be published in the Regulations.

Travelling to a tier 4 area from a tier 1, 2 or 3 area

You should not travel into a Tier 4 area from another part of the UK, other than for reasons such as:

- travel to work where you cannot work from home
- travel to education and for caring responsibilities
- to visit those in your support bubble - or your childcare bubble for childcare

- to attend hospital, GP and other medical appointments or visits where you have had an accident or are concerned about your health

You should continue to practise safe behaviours on public transport:

- plan ahead, check for disruption before you leave, and avoid the busiest routes, as well as busy times
- avoid making unnecessary stops during your journey
- avoid sharing a car with people not in your household
- keep your distance from other people when you travel, where possible
- wash or sanitise your hands regularly

International travel to or from a tier 4 area

If you are in Tier 4, you should not be travelling abroad unless it is permitted. In addition, you should consider the public health advice in the country you are visiting.

If you live outside a tier 4 area you may still transit into or through a tier 4 area to travel abroad if you need to, but you should carefully consider whether you need to do so. In addition, you should follow the public health advice in the country you're visiting.

If you do need to travel overseas from a tier 4 area (and are legally permitted to do so, for example, because it is for work), even if you are returning to a place you've visited before, you should look at the rules in place at your destination and the [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office \(FCDO\) travel advice](#).

UK residents currently abroad do not need to return home immediately. However, you should check with your airline or travel operator on arrangements for returning.

Staying away from home overnight

You cannot leave home for holidays or stays overnight away from your main home unless permitted by law. This means that holidays in the UK and abroad are not allowed. This includes staying in a second home or caravan, or staying with anyone you do not live with or are in a support bubble with.

You are allowed to stay overnight away from your home if you:

- are unable to return to your main residence
- need accommodation while moving house
- need accommodation to attend a funeral or related commemorative event
- require accommodation for work purposes or to provide voluntary services
- are a child requiring accommodation for school or care
- are homeless, seeking asylum or a vulnerable person seeking refuge
- are an elite athlete or their support staff or parent, if the athlete is under 18 and it is necessary to be outside of the home for training or competition

If you are already on holiday in a Tier 4 area, you should return to your home as soon as practical

Guest accommodation providers such as hotels, B&Bs and caravan parks may remain open for the specific reasons set out in law, including where guests are unable to return to their main residence, use that guest accommodation as their main residence, need accommodation while moving house, are self-isolating as required by law, or would otherwise be made homeless as a result of the accommodation closing. Accommodation providers are also encouraged to work cooperatively with Local Authorities to provide accommodation to vulnerable groups including the homeless in tier 4 areas.

Businesses and venues

Businesses and venues which must close

To reduce social contact, the regulations require some businesses to close and impose restrictions on how some businesses provide goods and services. These include:

- non-essential retail, such as clothing and homeware stores, vehicle showrooms (other than for rental), betting shops, tailors, tobacco and vape shops, electronic goods and mobile phone shops, and market stalls selling non-essential goods - these venues can continue to be able to operate click-and-collect (where goods are pre-ordered and collected off the premises) and delivery services
- hospitality venues such as cafes, restaurants, pubs, bars and social clubs; with the exception of providing food and drink for takeaway (until 11pm), click-and-collect, drive-through or delivery
- accommodation such as hotels, hostels, guest houses and campsites, except for specific circumstances, such as where these act as someone's main residence, where the person cannot return home, for homeless people, or where it is essential to stay there for work purposes
- leisure and sports facilities such as leisure centres and indoor gyms, indoor swimming pools, indoor tennis and basketball courts, indoor fitness and dance studios, indoor climbing walls
- entertainment venues such as theatres, concert halls, cinemas, museums and galleries, casinos, amusement arcades, bingo halls, bowling alleys, skating rinks, go-karting venues, indoor play and soft play centres and areas (including inflatable parks and trampolining centres), circuses, fairgrounds, funfairs, zoos and other animal attractions, water parks and theme parks
- indoor attractions at botanical gardens, heritage homes and landmarks must also close, though outdoor grounds of these premises can stay open
- personal care facilities such as hair, beauty, tanning and nail salons. Tattoo parlours, spas, massage parlours, body and skin piercing services must also close. It is also prohibited to provide these services in other people's homes
- community centres and halls must close except for a limited number of exempt activities, as set out below. Libraries can also remain open to provide access to IT and digital

services - for example for people who do not have it at home - and for click-and-collect services

These businesses and places will also be permitted to be open for a small number of exempt activities, including:

- education and training - for schools to use sports, leisure and community facilities where that is part of their normal provision
- childcare purposes and supervised activities for children
- hosting blood donation sessions and food banks
- to provide medical treatment
- for elite sports persons to train and compete (in indoor and outdoor sports facilities), and professional dancers and choreographers to work (in fitness and dance studios)
- for training and rehearsal without an audience (in theatres and concert halls)
- for the purposes of professional film and TV filming

Businesses and venues which can remain open

Other businesses and venues are permitted to stay open, following COVID-19 Secure guidelines. This includes those providing essential goods and services, including:

- essential retail such as food shops, supermarkets, pharmacies, garden centres and Christmas tree retailers, building merchants and suppliers of building products and off-licences
- market stalls selling essential retail may also stay open
- businesses providing repair services may also stay open, where they primarily offer repair services
- petrol stations, automatic (but not manual) car washes, vehicle repair and MOT services, bicycle shops, and taxi and vehicle hire businesses
- banks, building societies, post offices, short-term loan providers and money transfer businesses
- funeral directors
- laundrettes and dry cleaners
- medical and dental services
- vets and pet shops
- animal rescue centres, boarding facilities, and animal groomers (may continue to be used for animal welfare, rather than aesthetic purposes)
- agricultural supplies shops
- mobility and disability support shops
- storage and distribution facilities
- car parks, public toilets and motorway service areas
- outdoor playgrounds
- outdoor gym, pools, sports courts and facilities
- golf courses
- archery/driving/shooting ranges (outdoors)
- outdoor riding centres

Public services

The majority of public services will continue and you will be able to leave home to visit them. These include:

- the NHS and medical services like GPs and dentists. We are supporting the NHS to carry out urgent and non-urgent services safely, and it is vital anyone who thinks they need any kind of medical care comes forward and seeks help
- Jobcentre Plus sites
- courts and probation services
- civil registrations offices
- passport and visa services
- services provided to victims
- waste or recycling centres

Going to work

To help contain the virus, everyone who can work effectively from home should do so.

Where people cannot do so - including, but not limited to, people who work in critical national infrastructure, construction, or manufacturing - they should continue to travel to their workplace. This is essential to keeping the country operating and supporting sectors and employers.

Public sector employees working in essential services, including childcare or education, should continue to go into work.

Where it is necessary for you to work in other people's homes - for example, for nannies, cleaners or tradespeople - you can do so. Otherwise, you should avoid meeting for work in a private home or garden, where COVID-19 Secure measures may not be in place.

The risk of transmission can be substantially reduced if [COVID-19 secure guidelines](#) are followed closely. Extra consideration should be given to those people at higher risk.

Going to school, college and university

Schools and colleges will remain open during term time in Tier 4 areas. The Government will continue to prioritise the wellbeing and long-term futures of our young people. It remains very important for children and young people to attend, to support their wellbeing and education and help working parents and guardians. Senior clinicians still advise that school is the best place for children to be, and so they should continue to go to school during term time.

Universities

We expect that the majority of students, other than those who need or choose to remain at university, will now have returned to their family home during the ‘student travel window’. We have [published guidance on how they can do so safely](#).

We have also published [guidance to universities and students on how students can return safely to higher education in the spring term](#). This guidance sets out how we will support higher education providers to enable students to return as safely as possible following the winter break, by staggering this process and to facilitate testing for all.

If you live at university, you should not move back and forward between your permanent home and student home during term time.

Universities should follow guidance on reopening buildings to ensure they have safety measures in place to minimise the spread of the virus.

If you’re a student, you can meet in groups of more than your household as part of your formal education or training. Students should expect to follow the guidance and restrictions. You should socially distance from anyone you do not live with wherever possible.

Schools

The Government has confirmed that all secondary schools and colleges in England will be offered help, support and facilities to implement an additional round of free coronavirus testing from the first week of January.

This will be alongside a [staggered return to face-to-face education](#) in secondary schools, starting with exam years, vulnerable children and children of critical workers.

The offer of tests builds on the extensive protective measures already in place in schools and colleges to make them safe, as well as the government’s recent announcement that every secondary school and college in England will have access to [rapid testing](#) from January.

In schools and colleges where year 7 and above are educated, face coverings should be worn by adults (staff and visitors) and pupils when moving around indoors, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain.

There is [guidance for teachers, school leaders, carers and parents on education and childcare](#).

Childcare

There are several ways that parents and carers can continue to access childcare in Tier 4 areas:

- early years settings and childminders remain open, and you can continue to use these settings as normal

- you can access other childcare activities (including wraparound care) where reasonably necessary to enable parents to work, seek work, attend education or training
- nannies will be able to continue to provide services, including in the home
- parents are able to form a [childcare bubble](#) with one other household for the purposes of informal childcare, where the child is 13 or under
- some households will also be able to benefit from being in a [support bubble](#)

Some youth services are able to continue, such as 1-1 youth work and support groups, but most youth clubs and groups will need to cease for this period.

Visiting relatives in care homes

Visits to care homes can take place with arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, or behind windows.

Close-contact indoor visits supported by testing, which are allowed in Tiers 1-3, will not be allowed in Tier 4. [This](#) guidance will be updated shortly clarifying how visits in Tier 4 should be conducted.

Weddings, civil partnerships, religious services and funerals

Weddings, civil partnerships, and funerals

Weddings, civil partnership ceremonies and funerals must only take place in COVID-19 secure venues or in public outdoor spaces unless in exceptional circumstances.

Funerals can be attended by a maximum of 30 people. Linked religious, belief-based or commemorative events, such as stone settings and ash scatterings can also continue with up to 6 people in attendance. Anyone working is not counted in these limits. Social distancing should be maintained between people who do not live together or share a support bubble.

Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies should not take place except in exceptional circumstances, for example where one of those getting married is seriously ill and not expected to recover ('deathbed wedding') or due to undergo debilitating treatment or life-changing surgery. These weddings are limited to 6 people.

If you live in a tier 4 area and are going to a wedding, funeral or linked commemorative event outside the tier 4 area, the event must follow the tier 4 gathering limits on the events.

If you live outside a tier 4 area and are going to a wedding, funeral or linked commemorative event inside the tier 4 area, you must comply with the tier 4 gathering limits on the events.

Places of worship

You can attend places of worship for a service. However, you must not mingle with anyone outside of your household or support bubble.

You should follow the [national guidance on the safe use of places of worship](#).

Sports and physical activity

Indoor gyms and sports facilities will close. Outdoor sports courts, outdoor gyms, golf courses, outdoor swimming pools, archery/driving/shooting ranges, riding centres and playgrounds can remain open for individual exercise, and for people to use with others within your household, support bubble, or with one person from another household. Organised outdoor sport for under 18s and disabled people will be allowed.

Moving home

You can still move home. People outside your household or [support bubble](#) should not help with moving house unless absolutely necessary.

Estate and letting agents and removals firms can continue to work. If you are looking to move, you can go to property viewings.

Follow the [national guidance on moving home safely](#), which includes advice on social distancing and [wearing a face covering](#).

Financial support

Wherever you live, you may be able to get financial help:

- [financial support packages for businesses](#)
- [financial support for closed businesses as a result of tiering restrictions](#)
- [claim for employee wages through Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#)
- [check if you can claim a grant through the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme](#)
- [financial support if you're off work because of coronavirus](#)

Published 19 December 2020