

Government Guidelines: possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection

HELP SHEET 02

Symptoms

The most important symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

For most people, COVID-19 will be a mild illness. However, if you have any of the symptoms above you must stay at home and arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19 – go to testing to arrange.

Main messages

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 however mild, you must self-isolate for at least 10 days from when your symptoms started. You should arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19 – go to testing to arrange. Do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.

If you are not experiencing symptoms but have tested positive for COVID-19 you also must self-isolate for at least 10 days, starting from the day the test was taken. If you develop symptoms during this isolation period, you must restart your 10-day isolation from the day you develop symptoms.

After 10 days, if you still have a temperature you should continue to self-isolate and seek medical advice. You do not need to self-isolate after 10 days if you only have a cough or loss of sense of smell or taste, as these symptoms can last for several weeks after the infection has gone. See the ending isolation section below for more information.

If you live with others, all other 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 household became ill or if they do not have symptoms, from the day their test was taken. If anyone else in the household starts displaying symptoms, they must stay at home for at least 10 days from when their symptoms appear, regardless of what day they are on in their original 14-day isolation period. The ending isolation section below has more information.

If you have symptoms, try and stay as far away from other members of your household as possible. It is especially important to stay away from anyone who is clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable with whom you share a household.

Reduce the spread of infection in your home by washing your hands regularly for 20 seconds using soap and water, or use hand sanitiser, and cover coughs and sneezes.

Consider alerting people who you do not live with and have had close contact within the last 48 hours to let them know you have symptoms of COVID-19.

Following a positive test result, you will receive a request by text, email or phone to log into the NHS Test and Trace service website and provide information about recent close contacts.

If you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, then use the NHS 111 online COVID-19 service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms again at any point after ending your first period of isolation (self or household) then you must follow the guidance on self-isolation again. The section below has further information.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is intended for:

- people who have received a positive test result of COVID-19
- people with symptoms of COVID-19 who are waiting for a test result, or who have not been tested and do not require hospital treatment
- people living in households with someone who shows symptoms of or who has received a positive test result for COVID-19

Will my household be tested if we think we have COVID-19 symptoms?

Anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 must immediately self-isolate and arrange to have a test to see if they have COVID-19 - go to testing to arrange.

If you develop symptoms you may wish to alert the people who you do not live with and that you have had close contact with over the last 48 hours to let them know that you might have COVID-19 but are waiting for a test result. At this stage, those people should not self-isolate. Alerting those that you have been in contact with means they can take extra care in practising social distancing and good hand and respiratory hygiene. They can also be more alert to any symptoms they might develop.

People who have tested positive will receive a text, email or phone call requesting that they log into the NHS Test and Trace website to create a confidential account where they can record details about their recent close contacts. If you do not have access to the internet, then you will be phoned by a contact tracer working for the NHS Test and Trace service. The information you provide will be handled in strict confidence and will enable the NHS Test and Trace service to contact those people and provide them with advice on whether they should go into self-isolation. The people contacted will not be told your identity, but by alerting them when you first develop symptoms, you can help make sure that they are prepared for being contacted by the Test and Trace service.

Why staying at home is very important

It is very important that people with symptoms of or a positive COVID-19 test and their household members stay at home. Staying at home will help prevent the spread of the virus to family, friends, the wider community, and particularly those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test you must remain at home for at least 10 days after the onset of your symptoms (see ending self-isolation below). This will reduce the risk of you infecting others.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test, then you should avoid contact with other household members as much as possible.

Other members of your household, including those who do not have any symptoms, must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. You must not go out even to buy food or other essentials, and any exercise must be taken within your home. This 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in your house became ill or if they do not have symptoms, from the day their test was taken. There is more information in the ending self-isolation section below.

Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community.

While you are self-isolating, make sure you do the following things

Stay at home

You and everyone else in your household must remain at home. Do not go to work, school, or public areas, and do not use public transport or taxis.

Nobody should go out even to buy food or other essentials, and any exercise must be taken within your home.

If you require help with buying groceries, other shopping or picking up medication, or walking a dog, you should ask friends or family. Alternatively, you can order your shopping online and medication by phone or online. Delivery drivers should not come into your home, so make sure you ask them to leave items outside for collection.

Further guidance on accessing food and essential supplies is available at Accessing food and essential supplies.

If you are unable to work due to COVID-19, please refer to this guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions to find out about the support that is available to you.

Living with children

We are aware that not all these measures will be possible if you are living with children but keep following this guidance to the best of your ability.

What we have seen so far is that children with COVID-19 appear to be less severely affected. It is nevertheless important to do your best to ensure that all members of your household follow this guidance.

For those with learning disabilities, autism or serious mental illness

We are aware that not all these measures will be possible if you, or those you are living with, have significant conditions such as learning disabilities, autism or serious mental illness. Please keep following this guidance to the best of your ability, whilst keeping yourself and those close to you safe and well, ideally in line with any existing care plans.

Avoid contact with other members of your household as much as possible

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, it is important to reduce the spread of infection to others in your household as much as possible.

You should stay in a well-ventilated room with a window to the outside that can be opened, separate from other people in your home if this is possible. Keep the door closed.

Use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household, if available. If you have to share these facilities, regular cleaning will be required. If a separate bathroom is not available, consider drawing up a bathroom rota for washing or bathing. You should use the facilities last, before thoroughly cleaning the bathroom. You should use separate towels from other household members, both for drying yourself after bathing or showering and for hand hygiene purposes.

You should avoid using shared spaces such as kitchens whilst others are present. Take your meals back to your room to eat. Use a dishwasher (if available) to clean and dry your used crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them by hand using detergent and warm water and dry them thoroughly, using a separate tea towel.

If you have a clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable person living with you

Where possible, arrange for anyone who is clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable to move out of your home, to stay with friends or family for the duration of your home isolation period.

If you cannot arrange for vulnerable people to move out of your home, stay away from them as much as possible, following the guidance here. For the clinically extremely vulnerable please follow the Shielding guidance.

Those who are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable should be supported to take precautions to minimise their contact with other people in your household, regardless of whether others have symptoms or not. They should minimise time spent in shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas. Any shared spaces should be well ventilated.

If they can, clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable people should use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household. If this is not possible, consider drawing up a rota for bathing, with the clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable person using the facilities first. They should use separate towels from the rest of the household, both for drying themselves after bathing or showering and when washing their hands.

If they can, clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable members of the household should have their meals in their own rooms. 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 clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely 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 must 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.

Wash your hands often

Clean your hands frequently by washing them with soap and water for 20 seconds or using hand sanitiser. This will help protect you and the people you live with. This 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 a tissue, sneeze into the crook of your elbow, not into your hand. Dispose of tissues into a rubbish bag and immediately wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use a hand sanitiser.

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 for 20 seconds.

Face coverings

Used correctly, a face covering may help to protect others by reducing the transmission of COVID-19. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test result and you live with others, consider using a face covering inside your home when spending time in shared parts of the household, in addition to avoiding contact with other members of the household as much as possible.

You must stay at home for at least 10 days from when the symptoms started or from the date of your test, wearing a face covering does not replace this.

Further guidance on the use of face coverings is available along with instructions on how to make your own face covering.

People who are self-isolating, and members of their household, should double bag disposable face coverings and store them for 72 hours before putting them in a ‘black bag’ waste bin.

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 a clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable person in the house.

Clean a shared bathroom each time you use it, for example, by wiping the surfaces you have touched.

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 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 self-isolation has ended when you can then take the laundry to a public launderette.

Do not share towels, including hand towels and tea towels.

Do not have visitors in your home

Do not invite or allow social visitors, such as other friends or family, to enter your home.

If you or a family member receive essential care in your home, then carers should continue to visit. Carers should follow the relevant guidance to reduce the risk of you passing on the infection.

If you have pets in the household

COVID-19 in the UK is spread between humans. There is limited evidence that some animals, including pets, can become infected with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) following close contact with infected humans.

At this time, there is no evidence that pets can transmit the disease to humans, however, you should wash your hands after handling your pets or their waste.

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 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 of someone in your household is worsening. If it's not an emergency, contact the NHS 111 online COVID-19 service. If you have no internet access, call NHS 111.

If it is a medical emergency and you need to call an ambulance, dial 999 and inform the call handler or operator that you or your relative have COVID-19 symptoms.

All routine medical and dental appointments should usually be cancelled while 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 self-isolating, discuss this with your medical contact first (for example, your GP or dentist, local hospital or outpatient service), using the number they have provided.

Looking after your wellbeing while 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 stayed at home for a week or more 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.

Many people find it helpful to remind themselves why what they are doing is so important. Hopefully, none of your family will experience anything more than mild symptoms, but some people are badly affected by COVID-19. By staying home, you are helping to protect your friends and family, and other people in your community, as well as making sure the NHS does not get overwhelmed.

There are things that you can do to help make self-isolation easier. These include:

- planning ahead and thinking about what you will need in order to be able to stay at home for the full duration of isolation
- talking to your employer, friends and family to ask for their help to access the things you will need while staying at home
- thinking about and planning how you can get access to food and other supplies, such as medications, that you will need during this period
- asking friends or family to drop off anything you need or ordering supplies online, but make sure these are left outside your home for you to collect
- ensuring that you keep in touch with friends and family over the phone or through social media
- thinking 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
- planning out the full days of your self-isolation on a calendar, which many people find helpful. You may also find it helpful to plan in advance what you will do if, for example, someone in your household were to feel much worse, such as having difficulties breathing
- remembering that physical exercise can be good for your wellbeing, when you are feeling better. Look for online classes or courses that can help you take light exercise in your home