

COVID-19 Public Health Advice for the general public

How to stay safe from Coronavirus and protect those around you

Many people outside the health and care system are playing a vital role in society's COVID-19 response. To stay safe from Coronavirus [Public Health England](#) (PHE) advises that, for the general public, there is very little scientific evidence of widespread benefit from using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Instead, practising good [hand hygiene](#), [respiratory hygiene](#) and [social distancing](#) is key to minimising the risk of infection:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for the amount of time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice (around 20 seconds);
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw it in a bin and wash your hands;
- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home);
- If you go out, stay more than 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times.

If you are in an enclosed space where social distancing is not possible and you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet (e.g. on public transport, inside shops or when attending hospital) then use of a [face covering](#) is recommended to help protect others. It is important to use face coverings properly and wash your hands before putting them on and taking them off. It is now the law that you must wear a face covering at all times on public transport – see [national guidance](#) for further information.

PPE

It is vital to ensure that we can always provide appropriate PPE for those who work in genuinely high-risk areas. To this end, the UK Government and Public Health England have published guidance on PPE for the following sectors:

- those [cleaning non-health care settings](#),
- those [working in the management and care of deceased](#)
- [prisons and other prescribed places of detention](#)
- [first responders](#)

Currently, these are the only sectors outside of health and social care that have a clinical need for PPE. You will find all relevant PPE guidance in the newly created [PPE guidance hub](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

Should I be using PPE for my job?

If you provide essential care within the health and care system or look after someone in their household and **are within 2 metres**, you should refer to the [online government guidance for information on use of PPE in these settings](#).

For all other workers and sectors, there is very little scientific evidence of widespread benefit from PPE. Follow the advice above to protect yourself and others from risk of infection. So, if you are working at home or in an office, you do not need to wear any PPE but you do need to maintain a distance of more than 2 metres from anyone outside your household and continue to wash your hands frequently.

[Guidance for employers and businesses](#) includes helpful information on staying safe in the workplace.

I provide informal care for a friend or family member; how should I protect myself and them from COVID-19?

Unpaid or informal carers who provide essential care to family and friends should follow the [national guidance](#) specifically for this situation. Further information on providing informal care to someone who is extremely vulnerable and currently shielding is also available in the [national guidance for shielded individuals](#).

When should I be wearing a face covering?

It is now the law that you must wear a face covering at all times on public transport – see [national guidance](#) for further information.

You should also wear a face covering when attending a hospital as a visitor or outpatient and in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing is not possible.

You should always wash your hands before putting face coverings on and taking them off. See further advice from [Public Health England](#) on how to use face coverings properly.

Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you. However, if you are infected but have not yet developed symptoms, it may provide some protection for others you come into close contact with.

Face coverings do not replace social distancing. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 you and your household must isolate at home. Wearing a face covering does not change this.

A face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used by healthcare and other workers as part of personal protective equipment. These should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace.

What should I use as a face covering?

As previously stated, face masks should be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in the workplaces, such as health and care workers. For the general public, a face covering can just be a scarf or bandana tied behind the head as long as it covers both the mouth and nose and you can breathe comfortably. Please see guidance from PHE on the [safe wearing of a face covering](#).

PHE have also provided information about [making your own face covering](#) from a T-shirt or piece of fabric.

Should I make a face covering for my toddler to use?

Face coverings should not be used by children under the age of 2 or those who may find it difficult to manage them correctly, for example, primary age children unassisted, or those with respiratory conditions.

Note that babies and young children have smaller airways so breathing through a face covering is harder for them and they cannot remove the covering themselves if they are having trouble breathing. There is also a risk of the covering getting tangled which could lead to serious injury. Older infants and toddlers will touch their faces more as they try to remove the face covering.