Guidance for People with a Respiratory Infection, Including Covid-19, or a Positive Test Result for Covid-19

Who this guidance is for

Most people can no longer access free testing for COVID-19. This guidance is in 2 parts:

1. Actions you can take to protect other people if you are unwell with symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19, and you have not taken a test for COVID-19.
2. Advice for people who have taken a COVID-19 test and have received a positive test result.

There is separate guidance for people who have been informed by the NHS that they are at highest risk of becoming seriously unwell and who might be eligible for new COVID-19 treatments.

There is also additional guidance for those working in health and social care settings.

People at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell from a respiratory infection, including COVID-19

People who are at higher risk from COVID-19 and other respiratory infections include:

- older people
- those who are pregnant
- those who are unvaccinated
- people of any age whose immune system means they are at higher risk of serious illness
- people of any age with certain long-term conditions

The risk of becoming seriously unwell from COVID-19 and other respiratory infections is very low for most children and young people.

Some children aged under 2 years, especially those with a heart condition or born prematurely, as well as very young infants, are at increased risk of hospitalisation from respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

You will not always know whether someone you come into contact with outside your home is at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell. They could be strangers (for example, people you sit next to on public transport) or people you may have regular contact with (for example, friends and work colleagues). This means it is important to follow the advice in this guidance to reduce the spread of infection and help to keep others safe.

Symptoms of respiratory infections, including COVID-19

Respiratory infections can spread easily between people. It is important to be aware of symptoms so you can take action to reduce the risk of spreading your infection to other people.

The symptoms of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections are very similar. It is not possible to tell if you have COVID-19, flu or another respiratory infection based on symptoms alone. Most people with COVID-19 and other respiratory infections will have a relatively mild illness, especially if they have been vaccinated.

If you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as COVID-19, and you have a high temperature or you do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, you are advised to try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people.

Symptoms of COVID-19, flu and common respiratory infections include:

- continuous cough
- high temperature, fever or chills
- loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell
- shortness of breath
- unexplained tiredness, lack of energy
- muscle aches or pains that are not due to exercise
- not wanting to eat or not feeling hungry
- headache that is unusual or longer lasting than usual
- sore throat, stuffy or runny nose
- diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick

If you are feeling unwell with these symptoms you should get plenty of rest and drink water to keep hydrated. You can use medications such as paracetamol to help with your symptoms. Antibiotics are not recommended for viral respiratory infections because they will not relieve your symptoms or speed up your recovery.

In some cases, you might continue to have a cough or feel tired after your other symptoms have improved, but this does not mean that you are still infectious.

You can find information about these symptoms on the NHS website.

If you are concerned about your symptoms, or they are worsening, seek medical advice by contacting NHS 111. In an emergency dial 999.

What to do if you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19, and have not taken a COVID-19 test

Try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people

If you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as COVID-19, and you have a high temperature or do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people, until you no longer have a high temperature (if you had one) or until you no longer feel unwell.

It is particularly important to avoid close contact with anyone who you know is at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell if they are infected with COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, especially those whose immune system means that they are at higher risk of serious illness, despite vaccination.

Try to work from home if you can. If you are unable to work from home, talk to your employer about options available to you.

If you have been asked to attend a medical or dental appointment in person, contact your healthcare provider and let them know about your symptoms.

You may wish to ask friends, family or neighbours to get food and other essentials for you.

If you leave your home
If you leave your home while you have symptoms of a respiratory infection, and you have a high temperature or feel unwell, avoid close contact with anyone who you know is at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell, especially those whose immune system means that they are at higher risk of serious illness, despite vaccination.

The following actions will reduce the chance of passing on your infection to others:

- wearing a well-fitting face covering made with multiple layers or a surgical face mask
- avoiding crowded places such as public transport, large social gatherings, or anywhere that is enclosed or poorly ventilated
- taking any exercise outdoors in places where you will not have close contact with other people
- covering your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze; wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose and before you eat or handle food; avoid touching your face

Reduce the spread of infection in your household
While you are unwell there is a high risk of passing your infection to others in your household. These are simple things you can do to help prevent the spread:
- try to keep your distance from people you live with
- in shared areas wear a well-fitting face covering made with multiple layers or a surgical face mask, especially if you live with people whose immune system means that they are at higher risk of serious illness, despite vaccination
- ventilate rooms you have been in by opening windows and leaving them open for at least 10 minutes after you have left the room
- wash your hands regularly and cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- regularly clean frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles and remote controls, and shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms

- advise anyone that does need to come into your home that you have symptoms, so they can take precautions to protect themselves such as wearing a well-fitting face covering or a surgical face mask, keeping their distance if they can, and washing their hands regularly

GermDefence is a website that can help you identify simple ways to protect yourself and others in your household from COVID-19 and other viruses. People who use GermDefence are less likely to catch flu and other infections and are less likely to spread them at home.

There is further guidance on protecting yourself and others in living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19.

Children and young people (aged 18 years and under) who have symptoms of a respiratory infection, including COVID-19

Respiratory infections are common in children and young people, particularly during the winter months. Symptoms can be caused by several respiratory infections including the common cold, COVID-19 and RSV.

For most children and young people, these illnesses will not be serious, and they will soon recover following rest and plenty of fluids.

Very few children and young people with respiratory infections become seriously unwell. This is also true for children and young people with long-term conditions. Some children under 2, especially those born prematurely or with a heart condition, can be more seriously unwell from RSV.

Attending education is hugely important for children and young people's health and their future.

When children and young people with symptoms should stay at home and when they can return to education

Children and young people with mild symptoms such as a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough, who are otherwise well, can continue to attend their education setting.

Children and young people who are unwell and have a high temperature should stay at home and avoid contact with other people, where they can. They can go back to school, college or childcare, and resume normal activities when they no longer have a high temperature and they are well enough to attend.

All children and young people with respiratory symptoms should be encouraged to cover their mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when coughing and/or sneezing and to wash their hands after using or disposing of tissues.

It can be difficult to know when to seek help if your child is unwell. If you are worried about your child, especially if they are aged under 2 years old, then you should seek medical help.

What to do if you have a positive COVID-19 test result

Try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people

If you have a positive COVID-19 test result, it is very likely that you have COVID-19 even if you do not have any symptoms. You can pass on the infection to others, even if you have no symptoms.

Many people with COVID-19 will no longer be infectious to others after 5 days. If you have a positive COVID-19 test result, try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 5 days after the day you took your test. There is different advice for children and young people aged 18 and under.

During this period there are actions you can take to reduce the risk of passing COVID-19 on to others.

Try to work from home if you can. If you are unable to work from home, talk to your employer about options available to you.

If you have been asked to attend a medical or dental appointment in person, contact your healthcare provider and let them know about your positive test result.

You may wish to ask friends, family or neighbours to get food and other essentials for you.

At the end of this period, if you have a high temperature or feel unwell, try to follow this advice until you feel well enough to resume normal activities and you no longer have a high temperature if you had one.

Although many people will no longer be infectious to others after 5 days, some people may be infectious to other people for up to 10 days from the start of their infection. You should avoid meeting people at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell from COVID-19, especially those whose immune system means that they are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, despite vaccination, for 10 days after the day you took your test.

If you leave your home

If you leave your home during the 5 days after your positive test result the following steps will reduce the chance of passing on COVID-19 to others:

- wear a well-fitting face covering made with multiple layers or a surgical face mask
- avoid crowded places such as public transport, large social gatherings, or anywhere that is enclosed or poorly ventilated
- take any exercise outdoors in places where you will not have close contact with other people
- cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze; wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser after

coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose and before you eat or handle food; avoid touching your face

Reduce the spread of infection in your household
While you are infectious there is a high risk of passing your infection to others in your household. These are simple things you can do to help prevent the spread:

- try to keep your distance from people you live with
- in shared areas wear a well-fitting face covering made with multiple layers or a surgical face mask, especially if you live with people whose immune system means that they are at higher risk of serious illness, despite vaccination
- ventilate rooms you have been in by opening windows and leaving them open for at least 10 minutes after you have left the room
- wash your hands regularly and cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- regularly clean frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles and remote controls, and shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms
- advise anyone that does need to come into your home that you have a positive test result, so they can take precautions to protect themselves such as wearing a well-fitting face covering or a surgical face mask, keeping their distance if they can, and washing their hands regularly

GermDefence is a website that can help you identify simple ways to protect yourself and others in your household from COVID-19 and other viruses. People who use GermDefence are less likely to catch flu and other infections and are less likely to spread them at home.

What to do if you are a close contact of someone who has had a positive test result for COVID-19

People who live in the same household as someone with COVID-19 are at the highest risk of becoming infected because they are most likely to have prolonged close contact. People who stayed overnight in the household of someone with COVID-19 while they were infectious are also at high risk.

If you are a household or overnight contact of someone who has had a positive COVID -19 test result it can take up to 10 days for your infection to develop. It is possible to pass on COVID-19 to others, even if you have no symptoms.

You can reduce the risk to other people by taking the following steps:

- avoid contact with anyone you know who is at higher risk of becoming severely unwell if they are infected with COVID-19, especially those whose immune system means they are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, despite vaccination
- limit close contact with other people outside your household, especially in crowded, enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces

- wear a well-fitting face covering made with multiple layers or a surgical face mask if you do need to have close contact with other people, or you are in a crowded place
- wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitiser

If you develop symptoms of a respiratory infection try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people and follow the guidance for people with symptoms.

If you are a contact of someone with COVID-19 but do not live with them or did not stay in their household overnight, you are at lower risk of becoming infected. There is [guidance on protecting yourself and others in living safely with respiratory infections, including COVID-19](#).

Children and young people aged 18 years and under who have a positive test result

It is not recommended that children and young people are tested for COVID-19 unless directed to by a health professional.

If a child or young person has a positive COVID-19 test result they should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for 3 days after the day they took the test, if they can. After 3 days, if they feel well and do not have a high temperature, the risk of passing the infection on to others is much lower. This is because children and young people tend to be infectious to other people for less time than adults.

Children and young people who usually go to school, college or childcare and who live with someone who has a positive COVID-19 test result should continue to attend as normal.

[**How to reduce the spread of infection with the people you live with if you have COVID-19 (infographic)**](#)
PDF, 154 KB, 1 page

This file may not be suitable for users of assistive technology.

Request an accessible format.

How to reduce the spread of infection with the people you live with if you have COVID-19 (infographic text alternative)

If you have COVID-19, there is a high risk that others in your household will catch it from you. There are several things you can do to reduce the spread of infection in your household.

1. Limit close contact with others. Spend as little time as possible in communal areas.
2. Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces and shared rooms like kitchens and bathrooms.
3. Wash your hands regularly using soap and water, particularly after coughing and sneezing.
4. Get help where possible from those you live with. Ask for help with cleaning and being brought food safely to avoid unnecessary contact.
5. Use a face covering if you need to spend time in shared spaces.
6. Keep rooms well ventilated.
7. Catch coughs and sneezes in disposable tissues and put them straight in the bin.