

# Coronavirus (COVID-19): General advice

## Overview

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is the illness caused by a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan city, China. It can cause a new continuous cough, fever or loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste (anosmia).

Generally, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people and those with long term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

This is a rapidly changing situation which is being monitored carefully.

## Higher risk of severe illness

Some people are at higher risk of developing severe illness with coronavirus. These people should strictly follow physical distancing measures ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing](#)) .

Their household and other contacts should also strictly follow physical distancing advice.

## Extremely high risk of severe illness

Some groups of people are considered to be at extremely high risk of severe illness with coronavirus. These people should should strictly follow shielding measures ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding](#)) .

Their household and other contacts should strictly follow physical distancing measures ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing](#)) to protect them.

## I'm not sure if I fall into one of the more vulnerable groups. What should I do?

If you have an underlying health condition or take medicines regularly but you're not sure whether or not you fall into one of the more vulnerable groups, you should phone your GP practice and say you want advice about your underlying condition or your medicines.

People who are considered to be extremely vulnerable to severe illness will receive a letter giving them further advice, but if you remain unsure, contact your GP.

## Symptoms of coronavirus

The most common symptoms are new:

continuous cough

fever/high temperature (37.8C or greater)

loss of, or change in, sense of smell or taste (anosmia)

A new continuous cough is where you:

have a new cough that's lasted for an hour

have had 3 or more episodes of coughing in 24 hours

are coughing more than usual

A high temperature is feeling hot to the touch on your chest or back (you don't need to measure your temperature). You may feel warm, cold or shivery.

Some people will have more serious symptoms, including pneumonia or difficulty breathing, which might require admission to hospital.

## Could I have coronavirus?

Use this guide to find out what to do next if you have developed any of these symptoms and are worried about coronavirus.

## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Before using this guide

If you're asking on behalf of someone else, please make sure the person is:

conscious and alert

responding normally to you

If not, phone 999 and ask for an ambulance and tell them that you're concerned about coronavirus.

## If you have coronavirus symptoms

If you've developed symptoms (however mild) in the last 7 days, stay at home for 7 days from the start of your symptoms and arrange to be tested ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-testing/](https://www.nhs.uk/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-testing/)).

Do not go to your GP, pharmacy or hospital.

You should remain at home until you get the result of the test, and then follow the advice you will be given based on the result.

Read our stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-infection/](#)) .

## When to get help

Only phone 111 if:

your symptoms worsen during home isolation, especially if you're in a high or extremely high-risk group

breathlessness develops or worsens, particularly if you're in a high or extremely high-risk group

your symptoms haven't improved in 7 days

If you have a medical emergency, phone 999 and tell them you have coronavirus symptoms.

Caring for a cough or fever at home ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/caring-for-a-cough-or-fever/coronavirus-covid-19-self-care-advice/](#))

## Do the people I live with need to take any action?

If you live with other people and have symptoms, they'll need to stay at home for 14 days from the start of your symptoms even if they don't have symptoms themselves.

If they develop symptoms within the 14 days, they need to stay at home for 7 days from the day their symptoms started and arrange to be tested ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-testing/](#)) . They should do this even if it takes them over the 14-day isolation period.

Your whole household should follow our stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-infection/](#)) .

## Get an isolation note to give to your employer

You can send an isolation note to your employer as proof you need to stay off work because of coronavirus.

You don't need to get a note from a GP.

Get an isolation note (<https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/screener-question>)

## Is there anything I can do to prepare?

You should start planning now for how you would manage a period of self-isolation just in case everyone in your household needs to stay at home.

Your plan might include:

talking to your neighbours and family and exchanging phone numbers of household contacts

making a plan for those in your home who are considered vulnerable.

creating a contact list with phone numbers of neighbours, schools, employer, pharmacist and your GP

setting up online shopping accounts if possible

ensuring adequate supplies of any regular medication, but do not over-order

talking to any children or young people in your household as they may be worried about coronavirus

You can find advice for supporting your child's mental health during coronavirus (<https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/supporting-your-childs-mental-health-during-coronavirus>) through Parent Club.

## Testing for coronavirus

Anyone with symptoms of coronavirus should be tested. You can book a test for:

yourself

someone you care for

a child in your care

Key workers, and anyone in their household with symptoms, can access testing through their employer in the first instance and will be given priority.

If you test positive for the virus your close contacts will be traced as part of the national Test and Protect approach to containing the virus.

How to access testing (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-testing/>)

How contact tracing works (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-contact-tracing/>)

## Overseas visitors, asylum seekers and refugees

People who have come to Scotland to work, study or claim asylum (including refugees) will not pay for any coronavirus tests or treatments they need.

More about the coronavirus arrangements for overseas visitors ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/workers-travellers-and-community-support/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-and-treating-overseas-visitors-asylum-seekers-and-refugees/](#))

## How the virus spreads

Because it's a new illness, we don't know exactly how the virus spreads from person to person.

People can become infected when droplets land directly on them or they touch contaminated objects and surfaces. That is why good respiratory hygiene and hand washing are so important.

The virus might also spread by people 2 days before developing symptoms or by those who don't develop significant symptoms at all.

## How to avoid catching coronavirus

You can reduce your risk of getting and spreading the infection by:

avoiding direct hand contact with your eyes, nose and mouth

maintaining good hand hygiene

avoiding direct contact with people that have a respiratory illness and avoiding using their personal items such as their mobile phone

covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing with disposable tissues and disposing of them in the nearest waste bin after use

following the guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-infection/](#)) and arranging to be tested ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-testing/](#)) if someone in your household has symptoms

making sure everyone in your household follows the Scottish Government's coronavirus advice (<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>) as much as possible and to stay away from other people

making sure your household follows the physical distancing advice ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing/](#)), especially anyone in a vulnerable group

helping those at extremely high risk of severe illness with coronavirus to follow the shielding advice ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-](#)

covid-19-shielding)

## Food

You can't catch coronavirus from food. But it is possible to catch it if you touch an infected surface or object and then touch your mouth or nose.

Food Standards Scotland have answered some common questions about coronavirus and food (<https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/consumers/food-safety/coronavirus/questions-and-answers-covid-19>).

## Wash your hands regularly

Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser before eating and drinking, and after coughing, sneezing and going to the toilet.

### How to wash your hands

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9hCY-MldMA>)

## Treating coronavirus

Currently, there's no vaccine and no specific treatment for the virus.

## Ibuprofen

There's no evidence to show a link between ibuprofen, or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs), and catching or making coronavirus worse.

Paracetamol or ibuprofen can be used to help with the symptoms of coronavirus if needed, unless your doctor has told you paracetamol or NSAIDs are not suitable for you. Use these medications according to the instructions on the packet or label and do not exceed the recommended dose.

## Coronavirus helpline

We have setup a free helpline (0800 028 2816 (tel:08000282816)) to help with any questions you have about coronavirus that you can't answer online.

The helpline is open from 8.00am to 10.00pm each day.

## Further information

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Check your symptoms (/self-help-guides/self-help-guide-coronavirus-covid-19/)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Physical distancing (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-physical-distancing/>)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Shielding (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding/>)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Ask NHS inform a question (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-ask-nhs-inform-a-question#overview>)

## On other websites

Fit for Travel: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (<https://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/advice/disease-prevention-advice/novel-coronavirus-wuhan-china-infection>)

Scottish Government: Coronavirus in Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>)

Ready Scotland: Coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.readyscotland.org/coronavirus>)

## Common questions

### **Is there a risk of passing on infection through shared use of or contact with towels or bed linen used by a person who develops coronavirus?**

You should wash clothes, towels and bed linen that has been used by someone with symptoms at the highest temperature appropriate for the fabric. Follow the instructions on the manufacturer's label.

Anyone with symptoms of respiratory illness should:

- use their own towels and bed linen

- wash these separately from other people living in the household

- Don't shake dirty laundry as this can spread the virus through the air.

### **I have heard that someone who attends my workplace/my child's school has coronavirus. What should I do?**

You don't need to take any specific actions as long as you and your child remain well and you haven't been contacted because you're a close contact of someone with the virus. If you are identified as a close contact, you will be given further advice.

If you develop symptoms, follow our advice for self-isolation and arrange to be tested (</illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-testing/>). Phone 111 if you or your child has severe symptoms.

### **How soon after contact with the virus do people become unwell?**

Because this is a new virus, we do not know enough to have a precise incubation period. Experience so far suggests the average time it takes for symptoms to develop is 4 to 6 days after exposure, but it may be as short as 1 day or much longer.

## **How long can coronavirus survive outside the body?**

Items that may have been contaminated with the virus aren't considered to be infectious after 3 days. This includes any personal items or clothing used by someone who has had symptoms

After 3 days you can:

place rubbish bags containing personal waste, such as tissues used by someone with symptoms, in the normal waste

take laundry used by someone who is ill to a launderette

Regular household cleaning is important to remove the virus from surfaces and household items quickly.

## **I have had a positive test result for COVID-19 but I have not had any symptoms-what should I do?**

If you have had a positive test result you should follow all the guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-infection/](#)).

You must isolate at home for 7 days from the day your test was taken. All other members of your household must isolate at home for 14 days from the day your test was taken.

If you develop symptoms in the days after your test, you should re-start your own and your household's isolation from the day your symptoms start.

## **I've had a second test and it's still showing positive for coronavirus. What should I do?**

Repeating testing to show you no longer have coronavirus is not currently recommended for the general public.

The test can stay positive for several weeks after you've had coronavirus but this doesn't mean that you are still infectious. You may end self-isolation after 7 days as long as you feel better and no longer have a high temperature.

If your employer has told you that you need to be re-tested, you should follow their advice on when you can return to work.

Because this is a new disease, it is not yet known how much immunity people will develop following an episode of infection, or how long any immunity will last. If you recover from an episode of coronavirus confirmed by testing, and you later develop new symptom, you still need to follow all the advice about self-isolation and household isolation again.

## **Is my pet at risk from coronavirus?**

There's currently no evidence that pets or livestock can be infected with coronavirus.

It's always a good idea to wash your hands with soap and water after contact with pets and other animals. This can help to protect you and your pet against common infections that can pass between animals and humans.

Follow the Scottish Government's advice for pet owners (<https://www.gov.scot/news/coronavirus-guidance-for-animal-owners/>) to make sure you are following advice on reducing contact with other people

## **I am a carer, what will happen if I need to isolate?**

If you're a carer and need to isolate because you or someone you live with is unwell or you've been identified as a close contact, you should discuss the needs of the person you care for with your social worker or primary care team. They'll assess the risk to the health of the person you care for to find out what support they'll need while you're isolated.

You should also:

• speak with your family and friends about who could take over your caring role if you become unwell or need to self-isolate - just in case local services can't provide support

• have key information about the person you care for easily available so that anyone taking over care has all the information they need

If you or your friends and family are unable to care for someone, contact your local social work department for help.

## **What about my home visits from health and social care staff?**

If you need a home visit while you're self-isolating, tell your care provider in advance that you're following our stay at home advice so they can follow the appropriate guidance.

## **I provide personal care. How do I access personal protective equipment (PPE)?**

### **Unpaid carers**

If you're an unpaid carer who can't access PPE for your care role through your normal routes, phone your local authority or local carers' centre to find out how to access it locally.

Care Information Scotland has a list of local carers' centres and young carer services (<https://www.careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carers-centres/>). If your local carers' centre is unavailable, phone the Social Care PPE Support Centre (0300 303 3020).

The Scottish Government has published guidance for unpaid carers providing personal care (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-unpaid-carers/>) and information for social care providers, personal assistants, and unpaid/family carers on how to access personal protective equipment (PPE) (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/ppp-access-for-social-care-providers-and-unpaid-carers/>).

### **Personal assistants**

If you're a personal assistant who can't access PPE for your care role through normal routes, phone the Social Care PPE Support Centre (0300 303 3020) to find out how to access it locally.

The Scottish Government has published guidance on self-directed support options 1 and 2 (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-self-directed-support/>) for local authority and Health and Social Care Partnership staff for use during the coronavirus.

## **What effect does coronavirus have if someone is pregnant?**

As this is a new virus, how it affects someone who is pregnant isn't yet clear. You should carefully follow our physical distancing guidance to be safe.

We expect that a large majority of people who are pregnant will only experience mild or moderate cold or flu-like symptoms.

People who are pregnant don't appear to be more susceptible to the consequences of coronavirus than the general population.

We have more detailed coronavirus guidance for people who are pregnant ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-newborn-babies](https://www.nhs.uk/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-newborn-babies))

## **I have a condition or take medicines that affects my immune system. Do I need to take any special precautions?**

People with weakened immune systems can show different signs of coronavirus infection. Speak to your hospital care team or GP if you're concerned about any new symptoms.

You should also carefully follow our physical distancing ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing](#)) or shielding ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding](#)) advice, depending on the nature of your immune disorder.

## **How should I clean surfaces in my home if someone has been unwell with a cough, cold or other respiratory illness?**

Many readily available household cleaners will kill viruses and bacteria. You can either use a:

combined detergent/disinfectant solution

neutral general purpose detergent followed by disinfection

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for dilution and any guidance on application and contact times for all detergents and disinfectants.

Always wash your hands after cleaning. Wash or dispose of cleaning cloths as usual.

## **Will wearing a face mask or covering help to prevent the virus spreading?**

Face masks are important in clinical settings, such as hospitals.

People must by law wear a face covering in retail environments and on public transport and public transport premises such as railway and bus stations and airports. This applies to open air train stations but not to bus stops.

Face masks and coverings must not be used as an alternative to physical distancing, hand washing, respiratory hygiene and household isolation if someone in your household has symptoms. These are the most important and effective measures to prevent the virus spreading.

The Scottish Government has produced guidance on the personal use of face coverings during the coronavirus outbreak (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-2-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/face-coverings/>) .

## **Can I return unused medicines?**

You should only return medicines to your community pharmacy if it is essential. This includes palliative care medicines, controlled drugs, drugs that may be liable to abuse or in any situation where the medicines can't be secured.

If it is not essential, you can return unused medications when there are further relaxations of current Government instructions.

You cannot return essential medicines if you:

have or have had coronavirus symptoms (or a positive test result) and are still within your 7 days self-isolation period

are self-isolating for 14 days as someone you live with has or has had symptoms have been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive

If you or others in your household have symptoms you need to stay at home and follow our guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection ([/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/test-and-protect/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-infection/](#)) .

When returning medication:

wipe the outside of the bottle or packaging with a damp cloth using your usual detergent

place in a plastic bag

separate any medicines with needles or controlled drugs from other medicines

wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water or alcohol hand sanitiser after handling

## **Is it safe to drink from water fountains?**

In general, you shouldn't drink directly from the spout of a water fountain.

If the spout is a suitable design you can fill cups and water bottles. Spouts with 'swan neck' designs are most suitable for this.

You should avoid contact between the spout and your lips, or between the spout and the cup/container being filled.

## **What is the current advice for arranging and attending funerals?**

The Scottish Government has issued guidance on funerals

(<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-funeral-services/>) which outlines the current restrictions.

Learn more about what to do after a death during the coronavirus pandemic  
([https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/content/after\\_a\\_death\\_covid19/](https://www.goodlifedeathgrief.org.uk/content/after_a_death_covid19/))



Source: NHS Scotland

Last updated:  
21 July 2020