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Guidance

# Making a Christmas bubble with friends and family

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## 1. What you need to know

The festive period is an important time for many people of all faiths and none who come together over the holidays. The UK Government and Devolved Administrations recognise that people will want to be with their friends and family over Christmas, particularly after an incredibly difficult year. For this reason, the government is changing some social contact restrictions for a short period of time. When following these new rules, we must each continue to take personal responsibility to limit the spread of the virus and protect our loved ones, particularly if they are vulnerable (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>). For many, this will mean that it isn't possible to celebrate Christmas in the way you normally would.

Between 23 and 27 December:

- you can form an exclusive 'Christmas bubble' composed of people from no more than three households
- you can only be in one Christmas bubble
- you cannot change your Christmas bubble
- you can travel between tiers and UK nations for the purposes of meeting your Christmas bubble
- you can only meet your Christmas bubble in private homes or in your garden, places of worship, or public outdoor spaces
- you can continue to meet people who are not in your Christmas bubble outside your home according to the rules in the tier where you are staying (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>)
- you cannot meet someone in a private dwelling who is not part of your household or Christmas bubble

You should travel to meet those in your Christmas bubble and return home between the 23 and 27 December. Anyone travelling to or from Northern Ireland may travel on the 22 and 28 December.

A fixed bubble is a sensible and proportionate way to balance the desire to spend time with others over the Christmas period, while limiting the risk of spreading infection. However, the more people you see, the more likely it is that you will catch or spread coronavirus (COVID-19). You can spread coronavirus to others even if you and the people you meet have no symptoms. You and the other people in your Christmas bubble need to consider these risks carefully before agreeing to form a bubble. You should consider ways to celebrate Christmas in other ways, such as the use of technology and meeting outdoors, without bringing households together or travelling between different parts of the country.

Forming a bubble if you are vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable carries additional risks - see advice for clinically vulnerable people (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family#if-you-are-clinically-extremely-vulnerable>).

You should keep taking steps to reduce the spread of the virus, and this will help ensure that the festive period is as safe as possible. This includes ensuring indoor spaces get as much fresh air as possible, washing your hands regularly and for 20 seconds, and following rules on self-isolation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>) if you develop symptoms or test positive for coronavirus. You should get a free NHS test (<https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>) if you have symptoms, have been asked to by your local council or your hospital, or are taking part in a government pilot project.

## 2. Forming a Christmas bubble

Christmas bubbles, support bubbles (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household>) and childcare bubbles (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>) are all different things and have their own specific rules.

The rules on forming and using a Christmas bubble will be the law. You must follow them to minimise the spread of infection.

Everyone is allowed to form a Christmas bubble. There are three main rules:

- you can only be in one Christmas bubble
- you cannot change your Christmas bubble
- your Christmas bubble should not include people from more than three households

It is important that you keep your Christmas bubble as small as possible.

You must not form a Christmas bubble if you are self-isolating. See information on self-isolation and Christmas bubbles below (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family#self-isolation>).

## 2.1 If you're in a support bubble

Existing support bubbles count as one household towards the three household limit. This means that if you are in a support bubble, you can collectively form a Christmas bubble with two other households. This applies only to support bubbles as set out in law. You should, however, consider the risks of doing so and keep your Christmas bubble as small as possible.

Read guidance on making and using a support bubble (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household>)

## 2.2 If you're in a childcare bubble

Between 23 and 27 December, you can continue to use a childcare bubble, but only if reasonably necessary for the purposes of childcare and where there are no reasonable alternatives. If you want to meet socially with the other household in your childcare bubble, you should include them in your Christmas bubble. You and the other household in your childcare bubble would count as two households towards the three household limit for Christmas bubbles.

Read guidance on making and using a childcare bubble (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-childcare-bubble-with-another-household>)

## 2.3 Separated parents of children under 18

Children (under-18) whose parents do not live together may be part of both parents' Christmas bubbles, if their parents choose to form separate bubbles. Nobody else should be in two bubbles.

## 2.4 Forming a different Christmas bubble to the people you live with normally

You are allowed to form a different Christmas bubble from the people you live with normally. If you and the people you are living with want to be in different Christmas bubbles, you can choose to stay somewhere else with different people for this period and form a Christmas bubble with that household and one other household (this will count as three households). You should check the guidance on households where everybody is not in the same Christmas bubble below (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family#households-where-everybody-is-not-in-the-same-christmas-bubble>).

## 2.5 If you're a student who's moved home from university for the holidays

If you are a student who has moved home for the university holidays (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/student-movement-and-plans-for-the-end-of-autumn-2020-term>), you are considered to be part of the household to which you have returned. You are not treated as part of your term-time household for this period.

### 3. Meeting with your Christmas bubble, and other friends and family

Everybody in a Christmas bubble is responsible for taking clear steps to prevent catching and spreading the virus. If you do not follow these rules, you increase the risk of catching the virus, and spreading it to your friends and family.

You should take particular care to follow this advice if you are in a Christmas bubble with anybody who is vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable. There is further advice on what to do if you are clinically extremely vulnerable further down this page (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family#if-you-are-clinically-extremely-vulnerable>).

#### 3.1 Before forming and meeting your Christmas bubble

You should reduce unnecessary contact with people you do not live with as much as possible in the two weeks before you form your Christmas bubble.

Children should continue to go to school.

You should work from home if you can, but you should avoid unnecessary social interaction. Any increase in contact with other people increases the risk you will catch or spread coronavirus.

#### 3.2 Meeting your Christmas bubble indoors

Between 23 to 27 December you must not meet friends or family in your home unless they are part of your Christmas bubble. You can continue to meet people who are not in your Christmas bubble outside your home according to the rules in the tier you are staying in (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>).

If someone is in your Christmas bubble, you can visit each other's homes and stay overnight, including in private rented accommodation. You can also go to a place of worship together, or meet in public outdoor spaces.

You cannot meet your Christmas bubble in any other indoor setting, such as a pub, hotel, retail, theatre, or restaurant. In these settings, rules on who you can and cannot meet depend on your tier (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>).

We know that it's easier to catch and spread the virus in an indoor space, especially if there is little flow of fresh air. Therefore, when meeting your Christmas bubble you should take these measures to prevent the spread of the virus:

- wash your hands frequently
- clean touch points regularly, such as door handles and surfaces

If you are only visiting someone for a short time, you should:

- keep socially distanced from anybody you do not live with as much as possible
- make sure you let as much fresh air in as you can during a visit and after visitors have left, without getting cold, by opening windows and doors

#### 3.3 Meeting your Christmas bubble outdoors

You can be with your Christmas bubble in your garden or an outdoor public place. You can continue to meet people who are not in your Christmas bubble outside your home according to the rules in the tier you are staying in (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>).

Outdoor public places include:

- parks, beaches, parts of the countryside open to the general public
- public gardens (whether or not you pay to enter them)
- allotments
- playgrounds

### **3.4 Households where everybody is not in the same Christmas bubble**

If you have chosen to form a different Christmas bubble from other people in your household - the people you live with normally - you should take additional steps to prevent the opportunity for the virus to spread within your household, and between bubbles.

This might include:

- staying with another member of your Christmas bubble between 23 and 27 December where possible
- taking extra precautions such as cleaning surfaces and contact points like door handles and letting in as much fresh air as possible after someone has visited your household

### **3.5 Self-isolation**

You must also follow rules on self-isolation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>), which apply if either you, someone you live with, someone in your childcare or support bubble, or someone you have been in contact with, has symptoms or has tested positive for coronavirus. This means you must not form a Christmas bubble if you have coronavirus symptoms or are self-isolating. These rules are the law and you must follow them even if it means not meeting with friends or family over Christmas.

If a member of your Christmas bubble tests positive for coronavirus or develops coronavirus symptoms between the 23 and 27 December, or up to 48 hours after members of the bubble last met, all members of the bubble must self-isolate (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>) as if they were members of the same household.

### **3.6 If you are clinically extremely vulnerable**

You are still able to form a Christmas bubble if you are clinically extremely vulnerable but it does involve greater risks for you. You will minimise your risk of infection if you limit social contact with people that you do not live with.

Forming a Christmas bubble is a personal choice and should be balanced against the increased risk of infection. If you do decide to form a Christmas bubble you can take extra precautions set out in Guidance for the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable at Christmas. Others in your bubble should be mindful of your increased risks and be extra vigilant in the days before you get together.

### **3.7 If you are a care home resident**

The guidance on care homes applies to England - see guidance for Wales (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>), Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>), and Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>).

Spending time with others outside the care home will increase risk of exposure to coronavirus for the resident and the other residents in their home on their return, and is likely to place an additional burden on the care home. Given this, visits out of care homes should only be considered for care home residents of working age. Residents, their families and care homes should very carefully consider whether this is the right thing to do, or whether visiting at the care home would provide meaningful contact in a safer way.

Some residents may be able to leave their care home, in agreement with the home and subject to individual risk assessments. A care home resident may form a bubble with one other household, and should not form a three-household Christmas bubble at any point.

If a care home resident does join a household for Christmas they should maintain social distance, wash hands regularly, and let plenty of fresh air into rooms by opening windows and doors.

Others in the household should take steps to minimise the risk to the care home resident and others in the care home, recognising that introducing coronavirus to a care home puts all those who live and work there at risk. All members of the bubble should:

- take steps to minimise their potential exposure to coronavirus by limiting the number of people they meet for two weeks prior to allowing a care home resident into their household
- talk to the care home about getting tested prior to meeting the care home resident outside the care home. In order to safely return to the care home, the resident will need to be tested and isolated. We will provide further details shortly through the publication of relevant guidance.

In order to safely return to the care home, the resident will need to be tested and isolated. We will provide further details shortly through the publication of relevant guidance.

### **3.8 Travel and overnight stays with your Christmas bubble**

Between 23 and 27 December, you may travel between tiers and other nations of the UK if necessary to meet with other households in your Christmas bubble or return home. Once at your destination, you should follow the rules in that tier (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>).

You should not travel to see your bubble before 23 December, or travel back after the 27 December except in exceptional circumstances (for example, if a member of your Christmas bubble develops symptoms of COVID-19 and you are required to self-isolate). Anyone travelling to or from Northern Ireland may travel on the 22 and 28 December.

Transport routes may be busier than normal. Plan your journey and check for disruption before you leave to help keep everyone safe when travelling for Christmas. You should avoid making unnecessary stops during your journey. Where possible, avoid sharing a car with people not in your household.

If you plan to travel to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, you should read guidance from Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>), Wales (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>) or Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>) before you travel.

If you need to travel with your Christmas bubble, wherever you are, you should follow Safer Transport guidance. You should:

- plan, and avoid the busiest routes, as well as busy times
- keep your distance when you travel, where possible.
- wash or sanitise your hands regularly
- wear a face covering on public transport in England unless you are exempt

Different rules may apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Access further information on travel (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>)

You can stay in a hotel during the Christmas period, including in a tier 3: Very High alert area but only by yourself, or with other members of your household.

You can stay in private rented accommodation with members of your household, or your Christmas bubble.

### **3.9 After meeting your Christmas bubble**

In the two weeks that follow your last meeting with your Christmas bubble, you should reduce your contact with people you do not live with as much as possible.

Children can continue to go to school.

You can go to work if you cannot work from home, but you should avoid unnecessary social interaction. Any increase in contact with other people increases the risk you will catch or spread coronavirus.

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