



1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
2. Coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon>)
3. Rules and restrictions during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/rules-and-restrictions>)

Guidance

Making a support bubble with another household

How you can safely expand the group of people you have close contact with during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Published 9 September 2020

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From:

Department of Health and Social Care (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care>)

Applies to:

England (see guidance for Wales (<https://gov.wales/visiting-people-private-homes>), Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/pages/protection-levels-by-area/>), and Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you>))

Contents

- What a support bubble is
- Who can make a support bubble
- If you share custody of your child with someone you do not live with
- How support bubbles relate to other types of bubble
- Childcare bubble
- Christmas bubble
- Changing your support bubble
- If someone in your support bubble develops coronavirus symptoms or tests positive
- If NHS Test and Trace contacts someone in your support bubble
- If you're clinically extremely vulnerable

Print this page

What a support bubble is

A support bubble is a support network which links 2 households. You have to meet certain eligibility rules to form a support bubble. This means not everyone will be able to form a support bubble.

Once you're in a support bubble, you can think of yourself as being in one 'household'. It means you can have close contact with the other household in your bubble as if they were members of your own household. This means you do not need to maintain social distance with people in your support bubble.

You should continue to follow social distancing guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>) with people outside of your household or support bubble. This is critical to keeping you, your family and friends as safe as possible.

If you form a support bubble, it is best if this is with a household who live locally. This will help prevent the virus spreading from an area where more people are infected.

Who can make a support bubble

Not everybody can form a support bubble. However, on 2 December the rules changed to widen eligibility for forming one.

You can form a support bubble with another household of any size if:

- you live by yourself – even if carers visit you to provide support
- you are the only adult in your household who does not need continuous care as a result of a disability
- your household includes a child who is under the age of one or was under that age on 2 December 2020
- your household includes a child with a disability who requires continuous care and is under the age of 5, or was under that age on 2 December 2020
- you are aged 16 or 17 living with others of the same age and without any adults
- you are a single adult living with one or more children who are under the age of 18 or were under that age on 12 June 2020

You should not form a support bubble with a household that is part of another support bubble.

If you share custody of your child with someone you do not live with

If you share custody of a child with someone you do not live with, the child can move freely between both parents' households. You do not need to form a support bubble to do this.

You can form a support bubble if you are eligible.

How support bubbles relate to other types of bubble

A support bubble is different to a childcare bubble and a Christmas bubble. Being in a support bubble does not stop you from forming a childcare bubble or a Christmas bubble.

Childcare bubble

You might be able to form a childcare bubble to provide or receive childcare from one other household if you live with someone under the age of 14.

However, you must not meet socially with your childcare bubble, and must avoid seeing members of your childcare and support bubbles at the same time, unless otherwise permitted by gathering limits in your tier.

Christmas bubble

You can form a Christmas bubble between 23 and 27 December. There is a 3-household limit on a Christmas bubble.

Existing support bubbles count as one household towards the 3-household limit. This means if you are in a support bubble, you can collectively form a Christmas bubble with 2 other households. You should keep your Christmas bubble as small as possible.

Changing your support bubble

From 2 December you may change your support bubble provided that:

- your household, or the one you intend to form a new support bubble with, meets at least one of the eligibility rules
- the other household is not already part of a support bubble which they intend to remain a part of

If you decide to change your support bubble, you should treat your previous bubble as a separate household for 14 days before forming a new bubble. This means following the rules on meeting people from other households in the tier you are in.

Find out the coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions in your local area (<https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-local-restrictions>)

If someone in your previous support bubble develops symptoms or tests positive for coronavirus up to 48 hours after members of the bubble last met, all members of the bubble must self-isolate for 14 days (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>). You must not form a new bubble until you have completed your self-isolation.

If someone in your support bubble develops coronavirus symptoms or tests positive

If anyone in your support bubble develops symptoms (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/>) or tests positive for coronavirus, follow the stay at home guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>).

This is critical to controlling the virus, as it will help to stop it spreading across multiple households.

If NHS Test and Trace contacts someone in your support bubble

If NHS Test and Trace (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-how-it-works>) contacts you or someone in your support bubble, you should follow their guidance.

If you're clinically extremely vulnerable

If you're clinically extremely vulnerable (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>), you should reduce social contacts as much as possible. You will minimise your risk of infection if you limit all your contacts, particularly with people that you do not live with.

However, if you feel it is essential for your physical or mental health, you can maintain an existing support bubble, or form a new one as per the guidance on changing your support bubble. This is a personal choice and should be balanced against the increased risk of infection.

Those defined, on medical grounds, as clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus are people with specific serious health conditions.

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1. 8 December 2020

Updated with clarification of how support bubbles work for those in more than one type of bubble, and simplified guidance on travelling to form a support bubble.

2. 2 December 2020

Amended the eligibility criteria for a support bubble and added guidance on how to switch your support bubble.

3. 6 November 2020

Amended the definition of 'what a support bubble is'. Added information about childcare bubbles. Added guidance about forming or maintaining a support bubble if you're clinically extremely vulnerable.

4. 14 September 2020

Updated the guidance to say that support bubbles cannot be changed.

5. 9 September 2020

First published.

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(<https://www.gov.uk/transition>)

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- Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): Meeting with others safely (social distancing) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>)
- COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>)

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