

Guidance

Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK and protecting older people and vulnerable adults

Updated 20 March 2020

People over the age of 70 are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) and they should be following particularly stringent social distancing measures.

It is likely that people living within a household will infect each other so the advice for people over the age of 70 is to avoid gatherings with friends and family.

If anybody even has symptoms of coronavirus then everyone in the house must stay at home and not leave the house for **14 days**.

It might seem bad now but imagine not being able to leave the house and stopping everyone else going out for **two weeks**. And, of course, it would be worse if anyone passes on the virus and makes others sick too.

The over 70s are “strongly advised” to significantly limit their face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible. This advice is likely to be in place for some weeks.

People over the age of 70 should contact their regular social visitors such as friends and family to let them know that they are reducing social contacts and that they should not visit them during this time unless they are providing essential care (eg: washing, dressing, or preparing meals).

PRACTICAL ADVICE

CAN I GO SHOPPING?

Only if you absolutely have to. Make a list so you don't have to keep popping in and out. Better still ask someone to go shopping for you or get it delivered.

CAN I SEE FRIENDS?

If there is likely to be no intensive care bed for either you or your friend if you get sick (this is explained below) why risk it right now? If you do feel you have to see them meet them in the open air and in an open space. Don't touch them. Keep 2m away from them. A walk for exercise in the park is currently* recommended. Going for a coffee (so queuing with other people, touching surfaces that might have the virus on them, sitting face to face with someone less than 2m apart for an extended period, eating and drinking food that has not been prepared by you, etc) even if the cafe is still open is not. [*this might change soon, check for official updates]

CAN I SEE FAMILY?

Again, if there is not going to be an intensive care bed for you if you get sick why would your family want to run the risk of making you ill by coming to see you? For the next week at least, until we see if there really is going to be a massive demand on the health service, postpone all face to face contact. The doctors and nurses are asking us to try and do everything we can to not get sick. Whatever you think to the government and their advice I think we should all do what the medics are asking.

IS THIS REALLY SERIOUS?

Ask a teacher. This country has never announced the indefinite closure of schools and it has never cancelled exams, not even during the wars.

Ask someone in finance. This country has never had three budgets in a week and the government has never announced they'd pay 80% of everyone's wages so they could stay away from work indefinitely.

Ask someone in hospitality. This country has never forcibly closed pubs etc.

Of course, it is serious!

WHERE CAN I GET UP TO DATE INFORMATION?

This is the link to Harvard Medical School's page in the US which is being regularly updated

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/coronavirus-resource-center#Caregivers>

This is the link to our own government's regularly updating web page

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

This is the link to the NHS's page

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

It is very likely that people living within a household will infect each other. Here is information about the disease, how it makes you sick and how it spreads.

HOW LONG UNTIL I GET IT?

It can take between 2 and 14 days of being exposed to the virus to get the first symptoms. All this time you could be carrying the virus and infecting others.

The virus invades the lung cells. The lungs get inflamed and the body tries to kill off the virus. This is why one common symptom is a fever, our body is increasing its temperature to try and kill off the virus. Your lungs get damaged and cilia are shed into the lungs. The body tries to get rid of this by activating the cough response.

This is why another of the first symptoms is a new, persistent, dry cough, shortness of breath and/or phlegm production. Other symptoms are sore throat, fatigue, muscle aches and head aches.

About 10% of cases start with gastrointestinal symptoms presenting about 2 days before the respiratory symptoms.

WHAT ARE THE CHANCES IT WILL BE SEVERE?

86% mild to moderate This is much worse than a cold. These are proper flu-like symptoms. Anything less than needing oxygen puts you in this category.

14% severe and/or Requiring outside medical help normally oxygen

6% critical Respiratory or multi organ failure requiring intensive care

HOW DOES IT PROGRESS

Mild to Moderate cases start feeling like a cold, then it develops into feeling like the flu, by day 5 people in the vulnerable groups might feel difficulty breathing, but hopefully the body then begins to respond and you start to get better. However for the *Severe* and *Critical* cases things get worse. Most people who go to the hospital do so around day 7 because they have developed ARDS or pneumonia. Recovery time for these patients can be from a few days to a few weeks.

ACUTE RESPIRATORY DISTRESS SYNDROME

ARDS happens when fluid builds up in the lungs. 30-40% of ARDS cases are fatal. Most will require advanced life support to help the patient breathe as the disease runs its course.

DECIDING WHO GETS LIFE SUPPORT

When there are spare respirators everyone will get help. If there aren't enough respirators the doctors have to make a judgement about who is best equipped to pull through.

Patients over the age of 60 are less likely to survive because their bodies are older and less resilient. They are also more likely to have other conditions. This is why in places like Italy where many people are sick at the same time doctors are having to make the hard decision to not give support to older people when there are younger and fitter people more likely to survive who also need the respirators.

LUNG DAMAGE

The way most people die from the COVID19 disease is due to their lungs getting destroyed by the virus and their own over-reacting immune system. Their lungs fill with fluid and so not enough oxygen can get into the body. Normal bacterial pneumonia typically only effects a single lung so it is easier to survive and recover from. COVID19 attacks both lungs at the same time. Even if a patient survives they will almost certainly have permanent scarring in the lungs that could effect their breathing for the rest of their lives.

THERE IS NO VACINE

For the foreseeable future and at least the next year we will not have a vaccine so the best way to not get sick is to not get exposed.

HOW DO I AVOID GETTING EXPOSED?

The best way is to stay at home and keep away from anyone that could give it to you. Then the next best way to avoid it is social distancing. The COVID19 disease is transferred from person to person. If one person in a household gets the disease the chances are very high that everyone in the household will also be infected.

Only go out when you absolutely have to.

When you do go out go to open spaces with plenty of fresh air. Do not go into closed spaces with recycled air.

Keep away from as many people as you can while you are out. Wear gloves, use sanitiser and don't touch your face until you can wash properly with lots of soap and water.

And stop people coming in and out of your house.

Act as if you already have a nasty infectious disease and you didn't want to give it to anyone else.

This virus can be in your system for many days without you feeling sick. You might already have it.