

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

GUIDANCE ON THE RESTRICTIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND PUBLIC HEALTH ADVICE

This guidance will change frequently to reflect changes in the Regulations. This version of the guidance reflects the Regulations as they stand on **8 August 2020**.

The legislative framework has been substantially revised and it is important that you read this new revised guidance

The purpose of this guidance is to provide clear information and advice for the public on (a) the restrictions in law on movement and activities during the pandemic and (b) what you, your business, your place of worship or your organisation can and should do to limit the spread of COVID-19.

There are now two sets of regulations:

- the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(No. 2\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2020](#), which deal with restrictions on businesses and gatherings. In the paragraphs that follow these Regulations will be referred to as “the Principal Regulations”; and
- the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020, which, as the title suggests, deal with face coverings. In the paragraphs that follow, these Regulations will be referred to as “the Face Coverings Regulations”.

The restrictions in both sets of Regulations will apply until they are terminated. You must, therefore, take the time to understand what is required of you, both in law and by way of guidance.

In this guidance, the expression “you must not” is used where the Regulations prohibit an activity, and “you may” where the Regulations permit an activity. The

expressions “you should” and “you should not” are used to express advice including public health advice.

The guidance below is intended to protect you, protect other people, reduce the spread of infection and bring the epidemic to an end as soon as possible, so please follow the guidance.

The Executive is seeking to move quickly to relax the restrictions provided it is safe to do so. The Regulations are reviewed every 28 days and each restriction will only be lifted once it is no longer necessary.

In the event of a second wave of COVID-19, restrictions that have been relaxed may have to be brought back.

This guidance will be updated each time restrictions are revised, or the public health advice changes, and the updated guidance will be placed on the Department of Health’s website. Please check that you are referencing the most up-to-date guidance.

The guidance is in three sections:

- (1) requirements under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020
- (2) requirements under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020
 - a. what the Regulations mean for you as an individual citizen;
 - b. what the Regulations mean for your business;
- (3) the public health advice.

The first two sections are about the legally enforceable restrictions, while the third is about practical things you can do to protect yourself and protect others. The two go together and both are necessary to bring the epidemic to an end. The key to further progress is for each of us to act responsibly.

The main purpose of the guidance is to help you to navigate and comply with the restrictions and to enable you to live as freely as possible within the constraints that they impose. PLEASE NOTE: the guidance is not a definitive statement of the law and should not be quoted or relied upon as such.

This guidance includes links to other forms of guidance about COVID-19.

(1) REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE HEALTH PROTECTION (CORONAVIRUS, WEARING OF FACE COVERINGS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2020

Face Coverings Regulations

“Face Covering” means a covering of any type which covers a person’s nose and mouth.

It is now mandatory to wear a face covering:

- a) on public transport, in train stations and bus stations and**
- b) As from 10th August, in a shop or shopping centre – “shop” means any building, room or other indoor establishment which is open to the public in whole or in part and is used wholly or mainly for the purposes of retail sale or hire of goods or services. This not only includes ordinary day to day shopping for items such as clothes, food or electrical goods, a face covering is required in any other indoor place where goods or services are available to buy or rent. This includes, for example, a bookmakers, a food takeaway business, a dry cleaner etc.**

The wearing of a face covering in these settings is mandatory unless you have a reasonable excuse.

A reasonable excuse includes:

- when seeking medical assistance;

- providing care or assistance to a vulnerable person;
- to avoid injury, illness or to escape a risk of harm e.g. if you have respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis;
- where the person cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering because of any disability (within the meaning of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995) or without severe distress;
- the need to communicate with a person who has difficulties communicating (in relation to speech, language or otherwise);
- to eat or drink, where reasonably necessary or the need to take medication;
- the need to remove a face covering temporarily to comply with a request by a relevant person or another person acting in the course of their duties.
- where a person responsible for a relevant place (e.g. owner, proprietor, manager, tenant of a shop) or an employee of that person acting in the course of their employment, has asked that the face covering be removed for identification purposes.

It is important to be aware that there are circumstances that make it difficult for some people to wear face coverings. In these circumstances people may have a 'reasonable excuse' not to wear a face covering in a shop or shopping centre therefore it is important that you respect these individuals and remember that the reasons for not wearing a face covering may not always be visible.

If you are unable to wear a face covering you will not be required to provide evidence that you have a reasonable excuse. However if you do have a reasonable excuse it is recommended that you co-operate and assist with any such requests e.g. from a constable, shop owners, transport operators etc. as much as possible.

There are exceptions to the requirement to wear face coverings. In particular, they are not required to be worn:

- a) by a child who is under the age of 13;
- b) by a constable acting in the course of their duty;

- c) by an emergency responder acting in their capacity as an emergency responder;
- d) by a person providing a passenger transport service, or an employee of that person, where there is a partition between the person or employee and members of the public; or
- e) by a person responsible for a relevant place (e.g. owner, proprietor, manager, tenant of a shop), an employee of that person acting in the course of their employment or any other person providing services in the relevant place under arrangements made with a person responsible for a relevant place;

Places and premises where the Face Coverings Regulations explicitly do not require face coverings to be mandatory:

- a) on a school transport service;
- b) on a ferry where the area is outdoors and a distance of two metres can be maintained between any persons on the ferry or the part of the ferry which is open to members of the public
- c) in restaurants including restaurants and dining rooms in hotels or members' clubs; cafes, including workplace canteens; bars, including bars in hotels or members' clubs; public houses;
- d) in any area within or adjacent to a shop where seating or tables are made available by that business for the consumption of food and drink on the premises by customers of that shop
- e) in any area in a shopping centre which is open to the public and where seating or tables are made available for the consumption of food and drink.
- f) building societies, credit unions or cash points and undertakings which by way of business operate a currency exchange office, transmit money (or any representation of money) by any means or cash cheques which are made payable to customers;
- g) in a place where aerobic exercise is the primary purpose of attendance;
- h) in a place where there are ticketing or appointments systems in place e.g. cinemas, museums, etc. where attendance may be regulated by the sale of tickets or e.g. hairdressers, travel agents, estate agents where attendance can be regulated by appointment only systems. However if for example a

hairdresser/barber or any other retailer providing a good or a service does not regulate attendance by appointment or the sale of tickets by permitting e.g. “walk-ins”, then a face covering would be required as attendance is not regulated to ensure social distancing.

You may be asked to remove your face covering where a ‘relevant person’ e.g. a person responsible for an indoor premises or an employee of that person acting in the course of their employment, or a police officer has asked that the face covering be removed for identification purposes.

It is strongly recommended that a face covering is worn in all indoor public settings including those enclosed indoor areas and premises that are currently exempt and where social distancing of 2m or more cannot be maintained consistently.

(2) REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE HEALTH PROTECTION (CORONAVIRUS, WEARING OF FACE COVERINGS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2020

(a) GUIDANCE FOR INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN

The Principal Regulations impose restrictions on gatherings with other people.

Gatherings in private dwellings

You may gather outdoors at a private dwelling in a group of up to thirty people. In doing so you should maintain social distancing from people who are not from your household.

Up to 10 people may gather indoors in a private dwelling from a maximum of 4 different households (including the household that is hosting the gathering).

Overnight stays are permitted on the basis that the numbers of persons within the private dwelling does not exceed the 10 people 4 households, limit.

Large households

The regulations do not render larger households i.e. households consisting of more than 10 people, in breach of the law by virtue of their size. Larger households should note that if they have visitors some household members will not be able to be present to ensure the limit of 10 is not exceeded, but it is not expected that these situations will arise very often.

Indoor and Outdoor Gatherings (excluding Private Dwellings)

You, as a group of individuals, may gather indoors or outdoors (excluding in private dwellings) up to a maximum of thirty people.

Gatherings operated or organised by a responsible person

The thirty person limit does not apply to a gathering where that gathering has a recognised person responsible for organising or operating the gathering and it is organised or operated for cultural, entertainment, recreational, outdoor sports, social, community, educational, work, legal, religious or political purposes, or in an indoor sporting event or activity provided the arena in which it occurs is not capable of accommodating more than 5,000 spectators..

The person responsible when organising or operating the gathering must;

- (a) have carried out a [risk assessment](#) which meets the requirements of the [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2000](#), whether or not that person is subject to those Regulations; and
- (b) take all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of the coronavirus, including implementing the preventive and protective measures identified in the risk assessment and comply with any relevant guidance issued by a Northern Ireland Government Department.

Risk Assessments

A risk assessment is a suitable and sufficient assessment, by an organiser, of risks to the health and safety of their employees and of any other persons arising out of or in connection with the conduct by them of an event, for the purpose of identifying the preventive and protective measures they may reasonably take to limit the risk of transmission of the coronavirus.

A risk assessment shall be by the person who makes it if—

- a) there is reason to suspect that it is no longer valid; or
- b) there has been a significant change in the matters to which it relates.

In relation to employees under the age of 18, the organiser's risk assessment must take account of their inexperience, lack of awareness of risks and immaturity.

Preventive and protective measures are to be based on these principles:

- avoiding risks;
- evaluating risks which cannot be avoided;
- combating risks at source;
- adapting to technical progress;
- replacing the dangerous by the non-dangerous or the less dangerous;
- giving collective protective measures priority over individual protective measures; and
- giving appropriate instructions.

In summary a risk assessment consists of-

Identification of the risks which may contribute to transmission of the coronavirus;

Identification of the measures needed to limit those risks by eliminating them where possible and minimising them as far as is reasonable where elimination is not possible.

(b) **GUIDANCE FOR BUSINESSES INCLUDING SELF-EMPLOYED PEOPLE**

Businesses that must stay closed

If you are responsible for operating any of the following types of business you must keep it closed.

- Nightclubs;
- Soft play areas
- Conference halls and conference facilities, including those in hotels
- Bars, including bars in hotels, clubs registered in accordance with the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 and public houses unless the bar, registered club or public house-
 - is able to provide a main table meal on a table service basis alongside the service of alcohol, or
 - the bar, public house or registered club has an outdoor space, such as a beer garden (and where their licence permits them to do so) which enables them to provide alcohol in these spaces on a table service basis.

If any of the businesses listed above is part of a larger business, the larger business may continue to operate if it closes those parts of its business that are required to close.

Theatres & Concert Halls

Theatres and concert halls are permitted to open for rehearsals or a live recording without an audience, from 8 August 2020.

(3) PUBLIC HEALTH ADVICE

Coronavirus can be spread through close contact with an infected person or contact with a contaminated surface.

Social distancing

If you leave the place where you live, you should wherever possible maintain a social distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) between you and anyone outside of your household, to minimise your exposure to the virus and the potential to spread the infection. Where two metres is not possible a minimum of one metre distancing is still safer than close contact if additional mitigating measures are implemented e.g. good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene practices including the wearing of face coverings.

Who should adhere to social distancing measures?

Everyone should adhere to these measures at all times. On occasions when social distancing may not be possible or practicable, e.g. when providing or receiving medical assistance, other effective measures including good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene practices should be considered crucial and adopted and wearing of a face covering in these circumstances is recommended.

Those at higher risk of infection

You should take particular care to minimise contact with others including those within your household if you or a member of your household are considered to be at a higher risk of severe illness from Coronavirus. This includes if you:

- are over 70 (even if you do not have an underlying health condition); or
- are pregnant; or
- have an underlying health condition; or
- are considered, on medical grounds, as extremely vulnerable - that is, people with specific serious medical conditions. If you are in this group you would have been previously advised to shield by your GP or health care team.

Shielding

Shielding has been paused from the 31st July and therefore anybody previously advised to shield by their GP or health care team is no longer required to do so. While the risk of coming into contact with the virus is much lower, you still need to be careful because you remain more vulnerable than the general population. This

means that you can leave the house to undertake a range of activities allowed under the regulations. However it will be very important to follow existing guidance to:

- maintain social distancing
- wash your hands frequently
- don't touch your face
- avoid touching shared surfaces if you are out of your home and wash your hands afterwards if this has been unavoidable
- wear a face covering in indoor settings unless you have a "reasonable excuse" (as outlined earlier in this guidance).

Wherever possible, avoid enclosed spaces where social distancing is hard to maintain – such as public transport and shops. It is important to remember that because of your underlying condition, COVID-19 will remain a threat to you. This is about minimising any risk as much as possible and being aware that all contacts with the outside world must be managed carefully. More information on shielding is also available at www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-vulnerable-people.

Hand hygiene

Washing your hands properly is one of the most important things you can do to help prevent and control the spread of many illnesses. Good hand hygiene will reduce the risk of things like flu, food poisoning and healthcare associated infections being passed from person to person.

When you need to wash your hands

Hands normally carry lots of germs and should be washed:

- after you use the toilet;
- before you touch food;
- when you can see that they're dirty;
- after you have touched shared surfaces in public places; or
- after you have coughed or sneezed into your hands.

Washing your hands regularly will help to stop COVID-19 from spreading.

How to wash your hands

It is important to wash your hands properly. Make sure that you wash both your hands including the tips of your fingers, the palms of your hands and your thumbs.

The steps below explain how to wash your hands properly:

1. wet hands with water
2. apply enough soap to cover all surfaces of your hand
3. rub your hands palm to palm
4. right palm over back of left hand with interlaced fingers and vice versa
5. palm to palm with fingers interlaced
6. back of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked
7. rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa
8. rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa
9. rinse hands with water
10. dry hands thoroughly with a single use towel
11. use towel to turn off tap.

Respiratory hygiene

Like seasonal flu, the same public health advice applies for COVID-19: if you cough or sneeze, use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose, throw it away carefully after use, and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, use the crook of your arm.

Face coverings

In accordance with the Face Coverings Regulations, face coverings are now mandatory on public transport and in shops and shopping centres e.g. when shopping indoors for goods and services, to cover every-day high street, shopping centre and food shopping.

“Face Covering” means a covering of any type which covers a person’s nose and mouth. For further information on the requirement and exemptions to wearing face coverings please see the above section ‘Face Coverings Regulations’.

You are strongly advised to use face coverings in all indoor public spaces where 2m social distancing is not possible.

Crucially, do not get a false sense of security about the level of protection provided by wearing a face covering. It is essential that everyone continues to:

- practise social distancing as much as possible
- wash your hands thoroughly throughout the day
- ‘catch it, kill it, bin it’ when you sneeze or cough.

That’s still the best way to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.

Indoor Visits

You may visit another person’s household, either alone or accompanied by others. The maximum number of people allowed indoors in a private dwelling must not exceed 10 people consisting of a maximum of 4 different households at any one time (including the household hosting the gathering).

Indoor environments are still higher risk than outdoor meetings therefore you should follow public health advice and limit the duration of visits; ensure good ventilation; maintain good hand hygiene; and practice social distancing where possible. The use of a face covering is also strongly advised.

Particular care needs to be taken if any member is regarded as a vulnerable person in terms of the virus. If anyone who has visited another household develops symptoms, everyone who was present at the gathering should self-isolate for 14 days.

Work

You should continue to work from home where possible.

Employers and employees should discuss their working arrangements, and employers should take every possible step to facilitate their employees working from home, including providing suitable IT and equipment to enable remote working.

Sometimes this will not be possible, as not everyone can work from home. Certain jobs require people to travel to, from and for their work – for instance if they operate machinery, work in construction or manufacturing, or are delivering front line services.

You should not travel to work if you are experiencing [coronavirus symptoms](#), or if you or anyone in your household are self-isolating.

While at work you should adhere to social distancing advice where possible and stick to good hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene practices. Employers should implement procedures that are reasonably practicable to protect their employees and members of the public. Safety advice for employers can be accessed on the [HSENI website](#).

Travel, transport and holidays

The Regulations do not set limits for the distance that you may travel for any purpose. You should act responsibly and reasonably.

Public transport

Avoid using public transport e.g. trains, buses, taxis etc. if you can, to reduce exposure to the virus. If you have to use public transport to travel, e.g. to work or for basic necessities or supplies, you must wear a face covering. You should adhere to social distancing wherever possible and follow good hygiene practices e.g. avoid touching your face and follow good hand hygiene, as soon as possible. Hand sanitiser can be used when you do not have access to wash-hand facilities, however you should wash your hands as soon as you can.

Travel within UK and cross-border

England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland have their own specific restrictions which may differ from the NI Regulations. You must adhere to the Regulations in force in these jurisdictions during your visit.

If you travel to England, Scotland, Wales, Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands or Isle of Man by air or sea you will not be required to self-isolate for 14 days on your return to Northern Ireland. However, you should have regard to any restrictions imposed in the area you are travelling to, which may require you to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival at your destination or restrict your movement e.g. “local lockdown” scenarios.

International travel

You should carefully consider your holiday and travel options, in light of the continuing Covid-19 threat.

A Staycation is one way of mitigating the risks - while also supporting the local economy.

If you are holidaying abroad, you may have to self-isolate for a period of 14 days on your return home – depending on which country you have visited.

A list of the countries and territories currently exempted from the self-isolation requirements is available here:

Coronavirus (COVID-19): countries and territories [exemptions](#)

You won't have to self-isolate at home on your return from countries on this list. Please note that this list is continually under review and countries could be removed from it at short notice due to increases in their infection rates and the infection rates in the UK.

It is therefore possible that a country could lose its exemption while you are on holiday, meaning you would have to self-isolate for the full 14 days when you get back home.

Remember to always follow the public health advice whether you are abroad, having a Staycation or staying at home. Wash your hands frequently and well, and keep practising social distancing. That's the best way to keep yourself and your loved ones safe.

Further information on travel advice can be accessed on [NI Direct](#).

Holiday accommodation

You are permitted to visit holiday and tourist accommodation in the UK including hotels, hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation, holiday apartments, homes, cottages, bungalows, caravan parks, campsites and second homes.

Avoiding crowds

Large gatherings e.g. at a sporting event increases the risk of infection transmission. Social distancing is therefore essential to prevent further waves of the epidemic and everyone has a responsibility to ensure social distancing is adhered to.

Exercise and outdoor activity

You may attend or participate in outdoor activities. Sporting events are permitted with spectators. However indoor sports events may take place only at arenas capable of accommodating no more than 5000 people and social distancing must be observed where possible by all those attending.

USEFUL LINKS

You can find further advice and information on COVID-19 at the following links.

Guidance on workplace health and safety should be sought from the Health and Safety Executive NI. HSENI is the lead body responsible for the promotion and enforcement of health and safety at work standards in Northern Ireland. Together, HSENI and the district councils cover all work situations in Northern Ireland that are subject to the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978. HSENI guidance is at:

<https://www.hseni.gov.uk/about-hseni>

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/campaign/coronavirus-updates-support-your-business>

<https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/covid-19-workplace-safety-guidance>

The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/1993/20/made>

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