

Guidance on staying local and gatherings: coronavirus

 gov.wales/guidance-staying-local-and-gatherings-coronavirus

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Introduction

The Welsh Government is responsible for the public health response to coronavirus in Wales.

It is doing this by exercising its legal powers to make regulations, which introduce restrictions or requirements to prevent, protect against and control or provide a public health response to the incidence or spread of coronavirus in Wales.

The restrictions and requirements set out in the Welsh legislation are different in some respects from those elsewhere in the UK, so it is important you understand the law and guidance as applying in Wales.

When we reduce our day-to-day contact with other people, we will reduce the spread of the infection. That is why the Welsh Government has introduced a number of measures including:

- Requiring people to stay local, except in certain circumstances
- Closing certain businesses and venues
- Imposing restrictions on gatherings

Everyone in Wales must comply with these measures. The police have been given the powers to enforce the measures, including through fines and dispersing gatherings.

Ministers have a duty to review these restrictions every 21 days.

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Staying local

What does “local” mean?

The law deliberately does not define “local” as it can mean different things in different circumstances (see below). However, as a general rule, we consider anything within about five miles of your home to be local.

The great majority of people in Wales live within five miles of the usual range of amenities and public services, which are essential for everyday purposes – such as food shops, pharmacies, primary health services and banks. But in rural areas these services

may be spread over a wider geographical area, which may mean people have to travel further to access those services most local to them. So while five miles is a good rule of thumb for most people, if you live in a rural area, you will probably be used to defining your local area a little more widely.

If the essential services and amenities (such as food shops, GP surgeries, schools) nearest to you are more than five miles away, they will still be “local” to you. This would also apply to libraries and waste recycling centres.

Wherever possible, activities such as shopping, exercise or general leisure activities should take place locally. People should, for example, go to shops within about five miles of their home (and closer if possible) rather than travel further to visit similar shops at a greater distance, unless they live in areas where this would unreasonably restrict choice.

Travelling 10 miles to a supermarket is not considered reasonable, unless there is no practical alternative closer to your home. However, if you live in a village with only one shop, and the next nearest shops that you usually use are slightly more than five miles away, this would still be considered local - you are not restricted to always shopping in the same one place. This is an example that shows how being local is a flexible concept, within reason.

From 22 June “non-essential” shopping (for example for clothes) is allowed but this should be done locally. There are no exceptions to this.

As cases of coronavirus fall, Ministers have said they want to lift the requirement to stay local on 6 July, if the conditions continue to be favourable in Wales to allow this.

Reasons why people can leave their local area

At the moment, you should not leave your local area to do anything you could reasonably be expected to do locally.

However, there are certain activities, which are considered to be important enough to be exceptions to the requirement to stay local. In the regulations these are referred to as “reasonable excuses” to leave the local area.

The regulations say that these reasonable excuses are only available to you where it is “not reasonably practicable” to carry out the activity in your local area. A later section of this gives more guidance about what is meant by that phrase.

Reasonable excuses for leaving your local area include:

- To obtain supplies and services for you or your household, for example food, medicine, veterinary care and essential household maintenance
- To visit health services that are not available locally

- To provide care for or to help someone who needs it, such as an older person, a child or a vulnerable adult, though you should consider whether there are alternative sources of support available
- To help the NHS by donating blood
- To avoid injury or illness, or escape a risk of harm
- To visit someone on compassionate grounds (see next section)
- To attend court or satisfy bail conditions

It is also reasonable to leave your local area to go to work, but it remains the case that if you can work from home, you should continue to do so wherever possible.

You are also allowed to leave your local area to visit a cemetery, burial ground or garden of remembrance to pay your respects, and to attend a funeral if you are invited by the person organising the funeral, or are the carer of a person attending the funeral. (Though this is subject to limits on numbers who can attend, in order to ensure that 2m distance can be kept at all times).

Another reason for which you are allowed to leave your local area is to attend a marriage or civil partnership ceremony. Places of worship may be opened for the solemnisation of marriages and the formation of civil partnerships subject to the maintenance of social distancing measures and these venues will be able to decide whether they want to open for such purposes. This will mean that limited ceremonies can take place in these venues and in register offices. **This does not extend to receptions or other celebrations that many will want to enjoy as part of their wedding. Tackling coronavirus does not allow us to go further at this stage.**

Finally, you can travel outside your local area if you are registered to vote in an election overseas, in cases where voting can only be carried out in person. You should use postal or proxy votes (or other similar means of voting) where this is reasonably practicable, but where voting in person is the only available option eligible voters can travel to their officially-designated polling station, for example, in an embassy or consulate.

In considering whether there is a need to travel outside your local area, you should remember there is a personal responsibility on all of us to recognise the risks that the virus presents to ourselves, our families and friends and our wider communities.

People will need to make judgements for themselves as to what is reasonable, in line with that overarching principle. Please keep in mind that the purpose of the continuing restrictions is to prevent the transmission of the virus, including to those we care about. For this reason, you should try to avoid long journeys that would require you to use indoor facilities such as toilets while away from home (bearing in mind that public toilets are currently closed), as the risk of transmitting the virus is greater indoors, and the virus could be transmitted by or to you when you touch surfaces.

This is the rationale for trying to minimise time spent outside your local area, and as always you should follow guidance on social distancing. Personal hygiene will also

remain important, such as continuing to regularly wash your hands and where that is not possible to use a hand sanitiser.

If you have left your local area for one reason that is allowed, it may be reasonable to also undertake other essential activities while away from the local area, such as doing your weekly shop near your workplace. However, in keeping with the overriding intention of minimising the spread of the virus, you should only do these things if it will not reasonably be possible to do them locally to your home (for example, if you are away from home for work purposes throughout the opening hours for your local shops and there is nobody else who could reasonably visit the chemist for you).

Compassionate grounds for visiting family or close friends in Wales

We have received many questions about whether people can visit friends or relatives on compassionate grounds, often because somebody is suffering emotional distress or has a serious physical or mental illness.

In many cases visiting others is allowed as a reasonable excuse as it involves providing care or assistance to a vulnerable person. This includes being indoors with that person if that is necessary. This exception to the general rule has wide effect as it covers any form of care, provided by any person, to somebody who is vulnerable.

Whether somebody is “vulnerable” follows the ordinary sense of the word but the regulations make it clear that this includes any child, and (due to the specific nature of coronavirus) any person who is 70 or older or those who have one of a number of underlying medical conditions. It is also reasonable to take food and other supplies to a vulnerable person.

However, although caring for a vulnerable person is allowed, if somebody is particularly vulnerable to the effects of coronavirus, you should take this into account before going to see them, especially if they are shielding. It is vital that the risk of spreading coronavirus is minimised in such situations.

If you are not providing care to a vulnerable person, this does not necessarily mean that visiting someone outside your local area is not allowed. If there are compassionate reasons for visiting someone, we consider these to be circumstances where you will still have a reasonable excuse to leave your local area.

You may have compassionate reasons for visiting someone where that person is struggling with the lockdown generally, or they may be suffering from a physical or mental illness; have suffered a bereavement or you may be concerned about their general wellbeing or welfare.

Other examples of things that may be permitted include visits to people living or staying in care homes, in supported living services, or in children’s homes or young offender institutions. In each case, the service provider will need to put in place appropriate social distancing and safety measures before allowing visits, and you should contact

them before travelling.

More generally we are asking people not just to consider what they can do (what they are allowed to do by law) but also what they should do (what is the right thing to do to minimise the spread of coronavirus). You should consider how far you would have to travel, and the extent to which you would have to use shared facilities such as toilets or mix with others indoors (for example because you would have to stay overnight). You should also consider whether there are alternatives to visiting the person in person or whether care can be provided without going into their home.

Good hand and respiratory hygiene and social distancing practices should be followed at all times and you may also want to consider wearing a face covering where this is not practical. If visiting a hospital, hospice or care home you should contact them first and not travel without making prior arrangements.

Read more [information about wearing a face covering](#).

Read more information on [how to minimise the risk of spreading the virus](#).

All of the above guidance will apply equally to people coming from other parts of the UK as to people living in Wales. If you are a Welsh resident and you believe you have good reasons for visiting someone outside Wales on compassionate grounds or to provide care or assistance, you should also follow this guidance, but additionally you should read guidance from the country you are visiting.

As cases of coronavirus fall, Ministers have said they want to lift the requirement to stay local on 6 July, if the conditions continue to be favourable in Wales to allow this.

Travel for the purposes of exercise and outdoor recreation

Exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation are permitted and encouraged. Any kind of outdoor activity can be undertaken locally, which as above generally means within about five miles of your home.

However, we recognise there are certain forms of exercise which, though you start locally, may temporarily take you further afield. For example, a strong cyclist may get their exercise through bike rides of 40 miles or more. Exercise as a form of “active” travel in this way (a long cycle ride, run or walk) is now allowed, as long as the exercise starts and finishes from home. This would also apply to the use of mobility scooters or other powered devices for the purpose of exercise, for those who need to use them to get about.

That said, it is important not to risk spreading the virus by breaking that exercise and stopping or congregating with others outside your local area. Crowded places should be avoided, and social distancing should be maintained. The rules on gathering with others

also mean that while you can now exercise with people from one other household, group activities are still not allowed. Carers can also accompany people where this is needed.

You should also not travel (by car or motorcycle or using public transport) to the furthest reaches of your local area before starting your exercise to allow you to travel further from home. No journeys of any significant distance should be taken, for example, just in order to exercise in the countryside, at the coast or at beauty spots outside your local area (many of which are closed in any event to prevent this).

People with specific health or mobility issues may need to travel from their home in order to be able to exercise. For example, some wheelchair users or users of mobility scooters may not be able to start to exercise immediately outside their homes for practical access reasons, and may need to drive to a suitable flat location, such as a park, for this purpose. In these circumstances the journey should be to a convenient accessible location within the local area, or the nearest available one outside your local area and no long journeys should be undertaken unless absolutely necessary.

If your preferred form of exercise or leisure is one that can only be undertaken in specific locations, this still needs to be carried out locally. Examples of this might include golf, angling or watersports. If there is a place where you can do these within your local area, then you are free to do so, but it would not be permissible to drive outside your local area for these purposes.

As cases of coronavirus fall, Ministers have said they want to lift the requirement to stay local on 6 July, if the conditions continue to be favourable in Wales to allow this.

“Not reasonably practicable”

The term “reasonably practicable” is a common legal phrase, used for situations where a degree of personal judgement will be needed about what people can reasonably be expected to do. In the context of the requirement to “stay local”, it means that people should exercise their judgement about whether it would reasonably be possible for them to do certain things within their local area.

This is best demonstrated by examples.

- Some people may need to travel further than others to access an activity, for example because they have a particular mobility or mental health issue. In such circumstances it is reasonable for those individuals to travel further to find appropriate services with accessible facilities or suitable terrain for exercising. This is permitted under the rules.

- If you are reliant on public transport, and you can reach a shop outside your local area by public transport but could not reach any of the shops in your local area, you are allowed to travel to the shop outside your local area (although you should aim to go to the closest shop you can that will meet your needs).
- For some people, road quality or similar issues may mean that it takes considerably longer to get to somewhere three miles away than to a similar outlet that is 10 miles away but along a different, safer road. It might be reasonable in those circumstances to travel to the shop which is further away – although you should also consider whether either shop is likely to be particularly crowded, as it is also desirable to avoid large crowds.

All of these areas are again ones in which people will need to use personal judgement as to what is reasonable in their own circumstances, but are asked to act responsibly and to consider the risk to yourself and others.

These measures must be followed by everyone. Separate advice is available for **individuals or households who are isolating**, and for the **extremely vulnerable who are shielding**. Where parents (or anyone who has parental responsibility or cares for a child) do not live in the same household, children under 18 can be moved between their parents' or those people's homes.

The government has also identified a number of **critical workers** whose children can still go to school or their childcare provider. This critical worker definition does not affect whether or not you can travel to work – if you are not a critical worker, you may still travel to work providing you cannot reasonably work from home.

Critical workers and parents of vulnerable children may take children to and from school or their childcare provider.

Other critical public services – such as social services, support for victims, support provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, or the justice system – should be accessed remotely whenever possible, but you can leave the house to access them when physical attendance is necessary.

Moving house is allowed, but there are restrictions on how houses can be marketed.

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Closing certain businesses and venues

To reduce social and/or physical contact, the Welsh Government has imposed requirements on certain businesses and venues to close. Please see the **business closures guidance** for more information.

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Public outdoor gatherings

Outdoor activity

Developing scientific evidence demonstrates that coronavirus decays quickly (a few minutes) in strong sunlight.^[1] This means that being outdoors gives a much lower risk of transmission than being indoors. In light of this, there are no longer legal restrictions on the type of outdoor activity you can undertake within your local area, how often you can go outdoors or how long you spend outside. Indeed, exercise and other outdoor recreation is generally beneficial for health and wellbeing, and so it is strongly encouraged.

The principal legal restriction is now on who you are with and how close you are to them when you are outdoors, which is discussed in the next section.

However, there remain a number of practical constraints on what outdoor activity you can undertake.

Firstly, the range of activities open to you is still constrained by closures of certain businesses and other premises, such as outdoor gyms and playgrounds, where these have not yet been judged as safe to reopen.

It also remains particularly important to stop popular areas becoming overcrowded. For this reason, while driving is not prohibited, a number of car parks remain closed, for example near beaches and parks, and other local parking restrictions or road closures may be in place. You should also expect larger than normal numbers of pedestrians and cyclists on roads.

As a general rule, therefore, you should still try to drive as little as possible. If you can meet all of your household's needs within walking distance it is still preferable to do so.

Before leaving your home you should plan how you will keep safe and minimise risk. For example, consider whether and how you will avoid touching surfaces that others have touched, and how you will practice good hand washing and respiratory hygiene. Also consider circumstances where social distancing might be impaired and how you will avoid or mitigate the risk, and consider what additional things you may need to take with you, such as hand sanitiser and face coverings. Read further guidance about protecting yourself and others.

Many public toilets remain closed, as they pose particular risks to public health, and this should be factored in to decisions about how far you should travel from home.

As one of the purposes of the restrictions is to reduce pressure on the Welsh NHS, our advice is also that people should not undertake forms of exercise that involve a significant degree of risk.

Seeing people from other households outdoors

You are permitted to meet outdoors with people from **one** other household at a time provided you and they stay local. It is important however that advice on social distancing (staying at least 2 metres apart) and handwashing and respiratory hygiene should be followed.

There is no limit to the number of people from each household who can meet outdoors. If you are part of a household of five people, for example, your entire household could meet another family of five. However, you should be aware that while meeting outdoors is considered to be low risk if other advice is followed, risk cannot of course be eliminated, and the risk does increase as larger numbers gather.

Carers are considered for these purposes to be members of a household – so if for example one person in each household had a carer, both of those carers could also be part of a gathering between the two households.

You may only meet up to one household outdoors at a time. However, you may meet members of more than one household in a day, as long as those meetings are separate.

However, gatherings outdoors which include members of more than two households are still illegal, and you can be fined or prosecuted for participating in such a gathering.

There are no time limits for any such outdoor meetings or gatherings, or legal limits on the activities that can be undertaken outdoors so long as physical distancing can be observed.

You are advised to avoid wherever possible touching surfaces, as the virus can survive for many hours or days on some surfaces if it is not removed by sunlight or appropriate cleaning.^[2] When meeting people from another household you should also avoid touching anything which members of that other household have touched – so for example if you met for a picnic, each household should bring, prepare and eat their own food separately, and you should avoid sharing utensils, dishes or plates between households. It is also advisable to take an alcohol based hand rub (hand sanitiser) with you and use it often, especially before eating or after touching surfaces.

Private outdoor spaces

Given the scientific advice about transmission risks for coronavirus being significantly lower outdoors, you are encouraged to spend time outdoors as it is beneficial for health and wellbeing. While most people will in practice now be able to access outdoor spaces beyond their home (following the changes to the rules on 1 June), this does not apply to everyone. Therefore, it is now also permitted for members of two households to meet in private outdoor spaces such as one of their gardens, as long as this will still allow for a 2 metre distance to be maintained between the households.

This includes shared gardens, as long as there is sufficient space between different gatherings while maintaining social distancing between households. It can also include any other privately owned outdoor spaces such as balconies or outdoor walkways in a block of flats, again if social distancing can effectively be maintained.

There are particular risks to be considered in visiting private outdoor spaces. In particular, any time passing through indoor areas should be kept to a minimum. If it is possible to access a garden without passing through an indoor area, you should do this. People in Wales are asked to wear three-layer face coverings on public transport and in all other situations where social distancing is not possible. Read further [advice on the wearing of face coverings](#).

Both indoors and in the garden, the general principle is that you should not touch anything which members of another household have touched. Doorknobs, bells and light switches are all potential sources of infection. Touching surfaces should be avoided, especially indoors, and shared facilities (such as toilets) should not be used if at all possible. If not possible, they must be cleaned thoroughly, before and after use. Items such as cups, plates and cutlery should not be shared between households.

[1] SAGE paper SAGE35-2d

[2] <https://academic.oup.com/jid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/infdis/jiaa274/5841129>

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Indoor gatherings

Coronavirus spreads much more effectively indoors, because it can survive in the air and on surfaces for a very long time without direct sunshine.[1] In addition to requiring people to stay local, therefore, the law also imposes restrictions on people gathering indoors with others without a reasonable excuse.

The basic legal position is that you should not enter someone else's home, allow someone from outside your household into yours, or meet with someone from another household indoors.

The law includes reasons why it is permitted in limited circumstances to go indoors.

Entering into other people's homes, or allowing them into yours

The main reasons why you might legally enter another person's home are likely to be to provide care for or to help someone who needs it, such as an older person, a child or a vulnerable adult, or to carry out your work where this requires your physical presence. These are also the main reasons why you might let someone else into your home.

As with other areas of this guidance, a degree of personal judgement will need to be exercised as to whether you do genuinely need to enter into someone else's home or allow someone into yours, how long you/they need to remain there for, and what it is you/they really need to do there. In doing so you should bear in mind that when households mix indoors, it is a risk to yourself, members of the household being visited, the visitor's household, and anyone else who will come into contact with any of those people. The same consideration applies to allowing people into your home.

Where you do need to enter other people's homes, it is very important that you only do so if you are well, have no symptoms and you follow guidance on social distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene and reduce to an absolute minimum the surfaces you touch. We are not advising the use of a face covering. The general principle is that you should not touch anything which members of another household have touched. Doorknobs, bells and light switches are all potential sources of infection. Touching surfaces should be avoided wherever possible, and anything you do need to touch should be cleaned thoroughly afterwards. Shared facilities (such as toilets) should not be used if at all possible and should be cleaned thoroughly before and after use if their use is unavoidable.

Other indoor activity

The law on meeting people indoors is similar to the law on leaving your local area. In other words, as a general rule it is not allowed: but there are certain activities which are considered to be important enough to be exceptions to that rule. In the regulations these are referred to as "reasonable excuses".

The reasonable excuses for gathering indoors if needed include:

- to visit shops, alone or with members of your household and any carers
- to visit health services, including veterinary services
- to provide care for or to help someone who needs it, such as an older person, a child or a vulnerable adult, though you should consider whether there are alternative sources of support available
- to help the NHS by donating blood
- to avoid injury or illness, or escape a risk of harm

It is also reasonable to go inside a building with other people in it to go to work, but it remains the case that all those who can work from home must continue to do so wherever reasonably possible.

You are also allowed to go indoors as part of a visit to a cemetery, burial ground or garden of remembrance to pay your respects, or to attend a funeral if you are organising it, are invited by the person organising the funeral, or are the carer of a person attending the funeral.

Finally, we are also now allowing people to attend marriage or civil partnership ceremonies. You are allowed to be indoors for these purposes but social distancing rules apply. (Again this does not mean that wedding receptions may take place).

Where you do need to be indoors for any of these purposes, it is very important you follow guidance on social distancing, handwashing and respiratory hygiene and reduce to an absolute minimum the surfaces you touch. In some circumstances you may want to consider the use of a face covering (see advice here). The general principle is that you should not touch anything which members of another household have touched. Doorknobs, bells and light switches are all potential sources of infection. Touching surfaces should be avoided wherever possible, and anything you do need to touch should be cleaned thoroughly afterwards.

Specific guidance is available on workplaces and the responsibilities of employers and employees.

[1] <https://academic.oup.com/jid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/infdis/jiaa274/5841129>

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Complying with the restrictions

These measures will reduce our day-to-day contact with other people. They are a vital part of our efforts to reduce the rate of transmission of coronavirus.

Everyone must comply with the legal requirements.

The police have powers to enforce them, including through fines and dispersing gatherings where people do not comply. Separately local authorities, national park authorities have powers to enforce footpath closures.

These measures will be reviewed by the Welsh Ministers every 21 days. If you leave your home other than for a reasonable excuse, or gather in public, the police may:

- Instruct you to go home, leave an area or disperse
- Instruct you to take steps to stop your children breaking these rules if they have already done so
- Take you home – or arrest you – if you do not follow their instructions or where they deem it necessary

The police have powers to enforce compliance with the regulations and will act with discretion and common sense in applying these measures. We expect the public to act responsibly to save lives.

However, if the police believe you have broken these rules – or if you refuse to follow their instructions – they may issue you with a fixed penalty notice for £60 (reduced to £30 if paid within 14 days). This is doubled for each subsequent breach to a maximum

of £1,920 for the sixth and any subsequent case. If prosecuted, however, a court can impose any fine (it is not limited). Local authorities and national park authorities have similar powers in respect of people who are unlawfully on public footpaths which have been closed.

The government will keep this under review and will increase the penalties if it becomes clear that this is necessary to ensure compliance.

Similarly, a business or venue operating in contravention with these measures will be committing an offence. Local authorities (for example, environmental health and trading standards officers) will monitor compliance, with support from the police if appropriate.

If you do not pay, you may also be taken to court, with magistrates able to impose potentially unlimited fines.