

Childcare to be exempt from interhousehold mixing restrictions in local areas of intervention

- Informal carers will be able to provide care for children and vulnerable adults in parts of the country with restrictions on interhousehold mixing
- Children under 14 will be able to be cared for by individuals outside of their immediate household as part of a care bubble
- Arrangements must be part of a consistent childcare relationship

Informal childcare and caring arrangements will be allowed to continue across the nation, the Health Secretary has announced today.

Interhousehold mixing is currently banned in some areas under local restrictions, including parts of the North West, North East, and Bolton and Leicester. From Tuesday 22 September care bubbles will be able to form in areas of intervention, to allow families to share caring responsibilities with another household.

Today's announcement recognises that the current restriction of interhousehold mixing in areas of local intervention could cause hardship for families, and may affect the ability of essential workers, such as NHS front line staff, to do their job. The introduction of care bubbles will allow informal childcare arrangements to continue with another household, as long as they are consistent. One-off arrangements, such as a play date, will not be included.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock, said:

I know how vital all types of childcare are for family life. Whether a friend, relative, or a professional carer, it is essential that our children or dependents are well looked after and loved.

I have listened to concerns that have been raised around the ban on interhousehold mixing in place for local areas of intervention, and have now introduced a provision for those looking after children under the age of 14. Informal care can also continue for vulnerable adults. I truly sympathise with everyone who lost those vital extra hands to care for a child or loved one, and I hope that this eases their burden.

Approximately a third of children in England aged 0 to 4 used informal childcare in 2019. The new exemption means that a relative or friend can now care for a child or vulnerable adult from a different household, as well as the formal childcare provided by registered childcare professionals.

This exemption will come into force for all areas under current restrictions to ban household mixing, and all future areas. Exemptions for registered childcare already exists, with today's announcement extending to informal childcare arrangements.