

New campaign to 'Stop COVID-19 hanging around'

- Explainer film demonstrates impact of ventilation on reducing COVID-19 levels
- Clear advice to open windows for 10 minutes each hour when socialising indoors
- New research reveals how only a third of the public understand importance of ventilation

A new campaign launches today (Friday 5 November) across digital channels, radio stations and newspapers, demonstrating the importance of simple ventilation techniques to reduce the risks of catching COVID-19 this winter.

An explainer film – to be used on NHS and government digital channels – has been released by scientists from the Universities of Cambridge and Leeds, in collaboration with the government, demonstrating the positive impact of reducing COVID-19 levels indoors by opening a window for just 10 minutes every hour when socialising with others.

Part of a wider campaign, including national radio and press adverts, the key message will be to 'Stop COVID-19 hanging around'. The film clearly shows the difference in airflow and airborne particle movement when indoors in relation to COVID-19.

Voiced by Dr Helen Lawal, the film demonstrates how, in a home setting, someone infected with the virus talking and interacting with another person produces a build-up of COVID-19 particles in the air. These particles then linger in an unventilated room, like smoke, meaning the risk of catching COVID-19 is significantly increased. However, COVID-19 particles disperse quickly when good ventilation is introduced, even for a short period.

While the life-saving vaccines remain the best defence against COVID-19 – giving over 90% protection against hospitalisation from the virus – people can still catch COVID-19 even if they have been double vaccinated. With around one in three people with COVID-19 showing no symptoms, it could be passed onto others without knowing. With fewer restrictions in place this winter, following the success of the vaccination programme, the act of refreshing air in the home when people have visitors is even more important for everyone to keep infections down.

Dr Thomas Waite, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, said:

Small but important actions can help protect us against COVID-19. Getting vaccinations, wearing a face covering in enclosed spaces and taking regular COVID-19 tests all make an important difference but it is also crucial that we don't overlook the value of ventilation.

People with COVID-19 release virus particles into the air whenever they speak, breathe or cough and these can linger in unventilated settings. With winter fast approaching and people spending more time indoors, it's vital everyone understands the importance of using ventilation, such as regularly opening windows – even if just for a few minutes – to keep the air moving and prevent infections.

The campaign comes as new research reveals almost two-thirds (64%) of the public didn't know that ventilation was an effective way to reduce the spread of COVID-19 at home. And only around a third of people (29%) are currently ventilating their home when they have visitors over. Only 3% of those surveyed continued to ventilate their homes for a period after their guests left.

Professor Catherine Noakes, Professor of Environmental Engineering from Leeds University, said:

As winter approaches, people will naturally spend more time indoors, welcoming friends and family into their home as the weather gets colder. While we've all been looking forward to this for so long, it's important to remember that coronavirus is still around us and can easily spread in the home.

If someone is infected – and they might be showing no symptoms – COVID-19 particles are released into the air by coughing, talking or simply breathing. In an enclosed space, the infectious particles can build up over time. They remain suspended in the air, increasing the risk of other people in the room breathing in the infectious particles, especially if there is no ventilation or fresh air helping to refresh the air being breathed.

With this in mind, as we meet more people inside, it's so important to use ventilation, such as opening a window, even for just a short time, so fresh air can disperse and blow COVID-19 particles away and decrease the risk of others being infected.

In the run up to Christmas, as people spend more time socialising together indoors during the winter months, the potential for breathing in infectious COVID-19 particles will increase. The research showed that more than half (52%) of people will welcome an additional three people per week into their homes who do not live with them, and almost a third (30%) of households stated they will be entertaining more people in their homes than normal in the run up to Christmas.

As well as opening windows for a few minutes every hour to dilute virus particles, other simple actions the public can take to reduce the spread of COVID-19 include wearing a face covering over the mouth and nose in busy indoor spaces, such as public transport or shops. In addition, the government advises everyone to continue taking free rapid lateral flow tests regularly, particularly before mixing in crowded indoor spaces or visiting vulnerable

people. Testing is the quickest and easiest way to find out if someone has the virus, even if they show no symptoms.

Professor Stuart Dalziel, from the University of Cambridge who was part of the team that helped create the experiment, said:

This experiment clearly shows the impact that ventilation can have on dispersing built up COVID-19 particles in the home or indoor environment. With smoke representing COVID-19 particles moved around with the air, you can see that these particles hang around in the air when we are indoors in a room without ventilation.

However, these particles disperse much more quickly and leave the room when we let fresh air into the room, so the chance of others breathing them in is greatly reduced. We hope that this experiment helps people understand the impact that opening a window, even a little, can have on reducing the risk of inhaling COVID-19 particles, if present, when around others indoors.

Dr Helen Lawal, the GP and TV Doctor who voices the film, said:

As we head into the colder months, we will of course be wanting to meet up with friends and family more inside our homes, especially in the run up to Christmas. As cases of COVID-19 increase, however, it is incredibly important to remember the simple actions we can take to reduce the risk of catching COVID-19. Make sure you open your windows for a few minutes at a time to dilute virus particles that could build up if you have guests that are carrying COVID-19.

Also please remember these additional actions that will keep us, and those around us safe: wear a face covering; continue to take regular rapid lateral flow tests to help give you peace of mind that you're not spreading the virus; get a PCR test if you have any symptoms, and get your COVID-19 vaccination booster if you're eligible.

[Visit gov.uk/coronavirus for more information.](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

Background

± Opinium online survey conducted across a representative sample of 3,000 people in England, 15th – 20th October 2021 over 18 years.