

Joint statement on staying safe at Christmas from the UK Government, Scottish Government, and Welsh Government

As we approach the festive period, the UK Government, Scottish Government, and Welsh Government are seeking to balance pragmatism with the overriding priority of protecting public health. To do this, we have joined together to issue clear guidance and recommendations, as follows.

A smaller Christmas is a safer Christmas, and a shorter Christmas is a safer Christmas. The safest way to spend this Christmas is with your own household or your existing support bubble in your own home – and we strongly recommend that this is what you do if at all possible.

We know the extraordinary lengths that people have gone to this year to protect their loved ones and the NHS. We know that people want to see life return to normal. And with vaccines now being deployed, next year we are confident it will do. But to get there safely, this cannot be a normal Christmas. We must continue to work together to prevent the spread of the virus, and to protect our friends, our families and our front-line workers.

In some areas, the number of people with COVID-19 is rising rapidly, as it is in much of Europe. It is vital that we all act responsibly over Christmas to limit the risk of further transmission and keep each other as safe as possible. One in three people who have COVID-19 don't show symptoms but can still pass on the virus.

To protect you and your loved ones, we recommend that you think very carefully about the risks of forming a bubble. Discuss alternatives to meeting up in person, or ways of meeting up outdoors instead. Only form a bubble if you feel you absolutely need to.

If you do decide you need to form a Christmas bubble, take precautions to minimise risk by stopping unnecessary social contact outside your immediate household as soon as possible, and for at least five days before you meet other households in your bubble, and by working from home if you can. On no account should you visit another household if you, or anyone in your household, is feeling unwell or is self-isolating.

Scientific advice is clear: the longer you meet others for, the higher the risk of you catching and spreading the virus. If you do intend to form a bubble, you should keep the bubble small and your visits short.

The five day period is a window of opportunity and should be seen as a legal maximum, not a target. If you do form a bubble, we recommend that you meet with it for the shortest possible time. You should not stay overnight unless

absolutely unavoidable.

It is particularly important to think about the greater risks to more vulnerable people. If you are over 70 or clinically extremely vulnerable, think carefully about the risks. The safest approach may be not to form a [Christmas bubble](#). If you do form a [Christmas bubble](#), then be especially careful to observe the guidance: meet outdoors where possible, wash your hands regularly, keep a distance from those you do not live with. If you meet indoors, ensure good ventilation by letting in fresh air. The clinically extremely vulnerable and the elderly will be prioritised for vaccination in the early part of next year.

If you are in an existing household or support bubble with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, think carefully. To help reduce the risks to their health, the safest approach would be to celebrate with your household or support bubble and not with others.

If you are forming a [Christmas bubble](#) you should consider carefully the risks of travelling at all. If you live in an area with the highest level of protection, for example, tier 3 in England and level 4 in Scotland, you should avoid travelling to lower prevalence areas where possible. Each administration will issue specific travel advice based on its own circumstances. If you have to travel, book ahead to enable you and others to travel safely and plan your outward and return journeys carefully. Once you arrive you should stay local and not travel within the area.

If you form a [Christmas bubble](#), practise safe behaviours: washing your hands, making space between members of different households wherever you can, and letting in fresh air. Following these behaviours, even within the home, will greatly reduce the risk of transmission.

We will all need to carry on practising safe behaviours after Christmas. This means shopping only if you can do so safely: shop online where you can; avoid crowds; and, if you are in crowded areas, wear a face covering and only go where it is well ventilated.

It is also really important to cut down on social contact after seeing your [Christmas bubble](#), to reduce the risk of chains of transmission. This includes not meeting up with friends or family outside your household for New Year's Eve. The tier or level rules will be in place on New Year's Eve / Hogmanay and it is essential, as the minimum, that these are followed by everyone.

By taking these steps together, we can all enjoy a safer Christmas.

[Civil news: tender opportunity for](#)

HPCDS

News story

A tender has opened on 16 December for the delivery of the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme in Leeds.



A tender for the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme (HPCDS) to be delivered in Leeds opened on 16 December and will close at 5pm 19 January 2021.

This opportunity is open to all 2018 Standard Civil Contract holders currently delivering housing and debt services.

Length of contracts

The contract will be offered from 1 March 2021 until 30 September 2021, subject to the Legal Aid Agency's (LAA) right to extend for up to a further 12 months.

How do I tender?

Tenders must be submitted using the LAA's e-Tendering system.

Tender deadline

The tender opens on 16 December 2020 and closes at 5pm on 19 January 2021.

Further information

[Civil tender activity 2020](#) – to find out more and download the Information For Applicants document

[e-Tendering system](#) – to submit your tender

Published 16 December 2020

ESFA Update: 16 December 2020

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Last updated 17 December 2020 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 17 December 2020

We have added information on the staggered rollout of coronavirus testing for secondary schools and colleges, announced by the Department for Education today.

2. 16 December 2020

First published.

UK and US sign Customs agreement to ensure continued smooth trade

News story

Businesses trading with the United States will be able to continue to trade smoothly following EU exit, after the UK and US governments agreed a deal to continue Customs cooperation.



The bilateral Customs Assistance Agreement was signed by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury Jesse Norman and US Ambassador Robert Wood Johnson today at a signing ceremony at the US embassy in London.

The agreement will allow customs authorities to continue to cooperate,

including sharing data, to tackle customs fraud, maintaining the current strong relationship between US and UK Customs authorities.

Financial Secretary to the Treasury Jesse Norman said:

This is an important agreement that ensures continuity post EU exit, and demonstrates the strength of the US-UK customs relationship.

This deal will allow us to continue to cooperate in combatting customs offences by sharing information and good practice, and provides the legal underpinning for schemes to ease trade flows for importers and exporters.

US Ambassador Robert Wood Johnson said:

Every single day, the U.S. and the UK work side by side to stop criminals trafficking illegal goods across the Atlantic – from guns, to drugs, to illegal wildlife products and even counterfeit medicine.

This Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement means that after Brexit, our investigators can keep sharing information to stop criminals in their tracks and keep people in both our countries safe.

It will also provide the legal basis for the Authorised Economic Operator Mutual Recognition Arrangement, which will ensure that people and businesses will continue to benefit at their respective borders.

The Authorised Economic Operator scheme is an internationally recognised quality mark allowing a business customs benefits at the border, in recognition that its role in the international supply chain is secure and that it meets international standards on customs control procedures.

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[Community testing offer rolled out to highest risk Tier 2 areas](#)

- Community testing programmes will be offered to worst-affected Tier 2 areas, in addition to Tier 3 areas
- Rapid, regular testing will help drive down transmission rates to help

- prevent areas in Tier 2 moving into the toughest restrictions
- London is the latest local authority confirmed to receive enhanced community testing support

Local authorities in the worst-affected Tier 2 areas, will now be offered community testing in addition to Tier 3 areas, the government has announced today.

Building on the existing rollout of rapid testing to all Directors of Public Health, local authorities who are deemed at high risk of entering Tier 3 will be invited to submit community testing proposals to help drive down transmission rates based on their in-depth knowledge of their local community.

With around 1 in 3 individuals with COVID-19 not displaying symptoms and potentially infecting people unknowingly, broadening testing to identify those showing no symptoms will enable positive cases to be found more quickly and help break chains of transmission.

Tier 3 areas will continue to be prioritised for community testing, with 67 local authorities in Tier 3 having already signed up to the first wave of the enhanced testing support programme, with more roll outs expected in the new year. More than 1.5 million tests have already been deployed to Tier 3 local authorities to start community testing, with testing in Warwickshire, Darlington and Medway already underway.

Following yesterday's announcement of London moving into Tier 3, community testing initiatives have been rapidly approved for all boroughs to start from next week, to help stop the spread of the virus.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We are expanding the community testing offer to Tier 2 areas at significant risk of moving into Tier 3. Community testing can help drive down transmission rates in areas subject to the toughest restrictions, and now these testing programmes can also play a role in preventing areas from moving into Tier 3.

As many as 1 in 3 people who have the virus don't show symptoms and could be spreading the disease without knowing it. Broadening testing to identify those showing no symptoms will mean finding positive cases more quickly, and help save lives.

The sooner we get this virus under control, the sooner we can ease these restrictions and get back to doing the things we love.

More than 500,000 tests will be immediately deployed to London boroughs with many more to follow. Community testing initiatives to be rolled out across London include:

- City of London will prioritise key workers within the Square Mile

including social care, children's services, courts, schools, libraries and university staff. In addition to carers, volunteers, and university students

- Tower Hamlets is focusing testing in harder-to-reach community groups including multi-generational households.
- Hillingdon will specifically target higher prevalence locations
- Harrow's plan will include the business community, and general borough-wide testing

Local authorities can request support for this additional testing and support capability for an initial 6-week period, enabling them to create a bespoke testing programme for their community, using a model of local delivery supported by central resource. Proposals will also be carefully assessed at both a local and national level to ensure they are appropriate and safe and learning can be shared across the country.

Read the [updated community testing prospectus](#).

The decision about which Tier 2 local authorities are deemed to be at significant risk will be made as part of the ongoing review of tiers which considers a range of epidemiological data, alongside other information.

A continued assessment is being made on which local authorities will begin community testing, with the criteria being considered detailed in the [Community testing: explainer](#). Local authorities with rising rates and at significant risk of entering Tier 3 are encouraged to work with regional conveners to develop detailed plans for a community testing programme.