

# Public reminded to stay safe as COVID-19 England restrictions lift

With the publication of the [Living with COVID plan](#), the government has ended legal restrictions in England and is instead asking the public to practice specific safe and responsible behaviours as the primary means of stopping the spread of the virus.

From today, the government will remove the legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive coronavirus (COVID-19) test and also end routine contact tracing. Close contacts who are fully vaccinated will no longer have to test daily for 7 days, while unvaccinated close contacts will not be required to self-isolate.

However, staying at home and avoiding contact with others is still the most effective way to avoid passing on COVID-19 if you are infected. The government has set out full, updated [advice on what to do if you test positive for COVID-19](#).

With the virus still circulating in our communities, continuing to follow good public health behaviours is still vitally important. [UKHSA's Safe Behaviours Blog](#) and [updated government guidance](#) provides essential advice on how to reduce your risk of catching and spreading the virus.

Dr Jenny Harries, Chief Executive at the UK Health Security Agency, said:

While everyone will welcome the progress we have made with the vaccination programme, it's important to remember that COVID-19 is still with us and presents a danger to many.

Vaccines will remain our first line of defence against COVID-19 and it is vital that everyone eligible takes up the offer of their latest jab. Maintaining good hand hygiene, ventilating rooms well, and wearing a mask in enclosed spaces are simple steps that will also help minimise risk.

Free testing will remain on offer until the end of March and you should still book a PCR test if you have symptoms or take a rapid at-home test if you plan to visit someone vulnerable until then. If you test positive you should still stay at home and continue to keep away from others, just like you would if you had another infectious illness like norovirus or flu.

While the focus on prevention moves to individuals and communities, UKHSA will continue to monitor COVID-19 and its impact and advise policymakers and the public.

It will continue to be a global leader in genomic sequencing, enabling

potential new variants to be detected. It will also maintain a key national surveillance programme through the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) and assess COVID-19 in healthcare and care home settings through the SARS-CoV-2 Immunity & Reinfection Evaluation (SIREN) and Vivaldi studies, respectively.

The Living with COVID plan sets out how England will move into a new phase of managing the virus. The devolved administrations will each set out how they will manage this transition in due course.

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## [Extension to Chair of the Lay Observers' National Council](#)

News story

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This appointment is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and the extension has been made in line with the Governance Code on Public Appointments.

Lay Observers are unpaid public appointees appointed by the Secretary of State under the 1991 Criminal Justice Act. They inspect the conditions in which Detained Persons are transported or held by escort or custody contractors in England and Wales.

The Chair convenes and oversees the work of the National Council, leading its development and ensuring that monitoring is appropriately performed by the Lay Observers and that their work dovetails with that of other bodies.

## Biography

John Thornhill was appointed as Chair of the Lay Observers' National Council in June 2018.

Prior to this, Mr Thornhill was President of the Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) until 2017. In 2016, Mr Thornhill was awarded an OBE for services to the Criminal Justice System, and in 2013 awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree (LLD) by Manchester Metropolitan University in recognition of his distinguished achievements in the fields of law, education and public service.

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Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) provide statutory, independent oversight, monitoring the treatment and care of prisoners and detainees. They operate in prisons, young offender institutions, immigration removal centres,

some short-term holding facilities and on flights for those being removed from the UK.

## **Biography**

Dame Anne Owers was appointed as the first National Chair of the IMBs in November 2017.

Dame Anne currently chairs Koestler Arts, the prison arts charity. Dame Anne was the Chair of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (now the Independent Office for Police Conduct) from 2012 to 2017. She was Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons between 2001 and 2010 and chaired a review of prisons in Northern Ireland from 2010 to 2011.

Prior to that, Dame Anne was the Director of Justice, the UK human rights and law reform organisation (1992-2001), and General Secretary of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (1986-1992). She was also a member of the advisory group to the Lammy review of race and criminal justice.

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## **New plans to increase Civil Service diversity and better represent the people it serves**

- New diversity and inclusion plan will help levelling up, as civil servants will better reflect the people they serve
- Engagement with schools with higher proportion of children on free schools meals expanded
- Civil Service to focus on creating a truly inclusive workforce, with diversity not an end in itself but a way of delivering better outcomes for citizens

The people who design and deliver government services across the UK should better reflect those they serve, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Steve Barclay has said.

His remarks come as the Civil Service launches its new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which will see the public sector draw on the widest range of talent from different geographical, social and ethnic backgrounds.

The strategy also steps up a range of engagement with schools and communities in order to increase diversity, including:

- 50 new Enterprise Advisers, to work directly with schools and colleges

across the UK to raise awareness of and encourage education leavers into Civil Service roles

- Expanding outreach to schools with a higher proportion of students on free school meals
- Recruiting 1,000 prison leavers into Civil Service roles by the end of 2023, to give people from a wide variety of backgrounds a second chance in life
- Working with five local authority areas (Greater Manchester, Birmingham, Nottingham, North East Local Enterprise and West of England) to attract a broader range of talent into entry-level recruitment, including the Civil Service Fast Stream

Diversity of thought and embracing different perspectives is also a focus of the new strategy, with measures to ensure that groupthink is avoided.

### **Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Steve Barclay said:**

It's vital that the Civil Service reflects the people it serves right across the UK.

That's why we're relocating Civil Service roles out of London, allowing us to draw better on the skills and talent of people across the country.

This will help us level up the country, while bringing in more key skills in areas such as data and technology.

As part of a broader drive to ensure value for taxpayers money and to reduce spends on consultancy in government, the Civil Service will also become less reliant on the advice of external organisations for its diversity advice and policy. This will include those whose activities sometimes do not align to the Civil Service's commitment to impartiality. A specialist in-house team will ensure that the new strategy is being successfully implemented.

### **Chief Operating Officer of the Civil Service and Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary Alex Chisholm said:**

The Civil Service aims to be a model employer, attracting and making the most of all the talents available to us across the UK.

This new strategy will help us to deliver on this goal, strengthening our ability to meet the changing needs of modern Britain.

It is also an important part of our ongoing Government Reform programme".

Procedures will also be tightened up, in order to make sure that political views do not influence Civil Service advice on diversity and inclusion

policies and actions, including through stronger internal guidance.

Clear action on stamping out bullying, discrimination and harassment is also being taken, including implementing the recommendations of the 2018 Dame Sue Owen review and creating an open and transparent culture of reporting incidents, including through the Speak Up campaign.

The strategy launched today will create a Civil Service that understands, and is drawn from, the communities it serves. Through the Places for Growth programme, 22,000 Civil Service roles will be relocated out of London, contributing to levelling up and meaning that policy makers are closer to the people they serve. 2,000 roles have already moved and departments have already moved out of the capital. 50% of Senior Civil Service roles will also be located outside of London by 2030.

By moving more government policy jobs across the UK, people across the country will have the opportunity to influence key UK Government decision-making without having to move to the capital. Glasgow has already been announced as the location for the Cabinet Office's second headquarters and the Ministry of Justice will also be expanding their presence in Wales.

Added emphasis will be put on diversity within teams, ensuring those working on public services have different perspectives, experiences and insight. This will help innovation, problem solving and promote stronger decision making. To do this, line managers will be encouraged to develop diversity of thought and avoid groupthink. Civil Service training will be adapted so that managers are able to unlock diversity of thinking.

The government is also partnering with national and local media to highlight the range of Civil Service roles available outside of London. The partnership will demonstrate the diversity of background and location of staff across the UK, and signpost opportunities for people to pursue a career in the Civil Service outside of London.

The launch of today's strategy also delivers on the commitment made within the Declaration on Government Reform in June 2021.

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## **Number of rough sleepers reaches 8-year low**

Press release

The number of people sleeping rough on England's streets is at its lowest level in 8 years and has halved since 2017.



The annual rough sleeping statistics, published today (24 February 2022), show that rates have fallen for a fourth year in a row with a 9% reduction in rough sleeping compared to last year. Numbers have fallen in every region of England, taking levels to an 8-year low overall.

The number of people in emergency accommodation has also nearly halved, with more people securing long-term homes.

Rough Sleeping and Housing Minister Eddie Hughes MP said:

The government remains focused on ending rough sleeping by the end of this parliament and we're making excellent progress towards this.

Today's figures are testament to that, showing our investment is helping more people have a roof over their heads and the best possible chance of turning their lives around.

£800 million has been invested this year alone to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping, with £2 billion committed over the next 3 years.

This includes providing 6,000 long-term homes through the £433 million Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme and up to £52 million for rehab and detox services for people with drug or alcohol issues.

The government has committed to publishing its Rough Sleeping strategy, to set out a plan for how it will continue its work to end rough sleeping by ensuring rough sleeping is prevented in the first instance, and responded to effectively in the rare cases where it occurs.

Today's [Annual rough sleeping snapshot](#) measures the number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2021.

As part of its commitment to be more transparent, the government has published additional data on the support available for rough sleepers, providing a fuller picture so the problem can be tackled.

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