

- Local Government

COVID-19: Guidance for wedding and civil partnership receptions and celebrations

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This guidance is of a general nature and should be treated as a guide. In the event of any conflict between any applicable legislation (including the health and safety legislation) and this guidance, the applicable legislation shall prevail.

This guidance is only applicable in England. For guidance in Scotland, Wales or [Northern Ireland](#), please refer to guidance from the relevant national governments.

Please consider if [local restrictions](#) are in place when reading and implementing this guidance.

1. Introduction

The UK is currently experiencing a public health emergency as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The [characteristics of COVID-19](#) are outlined by Public Health England. The transmission of COVID-19 is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing, and through contact with contaminated surfaces. Evidence on the most effective steps that can be taken to limit the transmission of the virus continues to be regularly reviewed. This guidance may be updated in the future in response to changing scientific understanding.

Marriages and civil partnerships are a vital part of our society, uniting couples to start their new life together and affording certain legal rights. These ceremonies are often followed by receptions and other celebrations attended by guests that are known to one another. However, by their very nature, in bringing families and friends together, they are particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19.

The government has been working closely with stakeholders in the wedding industry to consider how we are able to allow small wedding and civil partnership celebrations to take place safely.

This guidance remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation.

2. Purpose of this guidance

This guidance is designed to assist venues that host wedding and civil partnership receptions and celebrations in England, and other businesses involved in these events, to prepare their activities in accordance with the associated legislation.

The guidance sets out how this can be done in a manner that is safe and in line with social distancing guidelines, in order to minimise the risk of exposure to infection for all individuals attending the events, including those who work at the venues.

This guidance applies only to marriage and civil partnership receptions and celebrations taking place in England. See the [government's guidance on marriage ceremonies and civil partnership formations](#).

This guidance supersedes previous guidance. From 15 August 2020 receptions and other celebrations for weddings and civil partnerships can take place, but only in a COVID-19 Secure environment/venue. Such events should not take place in people's private homes (or adjoining outdoor spaces like gardens), given that these will not have the same COVID-19 Secure measures in place.

From 28 September 2020, capacity at a wedding or civil partnership reception or celebration (including the couple and guests) must be no more than 15, and safely accommodated with social distancing in a COVID-19 Secure venue. Anyone working, for example officiants, staff employed by the venue, any third-party suppliers, photographers, security personnel, or catering staff, are not included in this figure. We will re-assess guidance in relation to larger wedding receptions in line with the development of the scientific advice.

Definitions for the purpose of this guidance

‘Reception’ and ‘celebration’	A gathering of people to mark the occasion of the marriage or civil partnership of a couple, usually involving a sit-down meal.
‘Officiant’	A person acting in an official capacity. This could be a person with certain legal responsibilities at the ceremony, such as a registration official or authorised person, or a minister of religion solemnising the marriage.
‘Venue’	Any COVID-19 Secure location at which a reception or celebration takes place.
‘Venue managers’	The person or persons responsible for the management of a venue, including assessment of compliance with the following guidelines.
‘Visitor’, ‘attendee’ or ‘guest’	Individuals or households entering a venue for the purpose of attending a reception or celebration.
‘Third-party supplier’	Any other individuals providing a service on site for receptions and celebrations. This can be either during the event itself, or prior to/following the event for the purposes of preparing and/or tidying up.
‘Must’	Where the guidance states that an activity must take place this is because it is a legal requirement, in particular, under the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2020 and other legal requirements that may apply in your area (including, where directions have been given, under the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 3) (England) Regulations 2020).
‘Should’	Where the guidance states that an activity should take place this is not a legal requirement, however it is strongly advised that consideration is given to following the advice being given to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.
‘Household’ and ‘Support Bubble’	<p>A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.</p> <p>A support bubble is where a single adult living alone, or a single parent with children under 18, can form an exclusive network with one other household where social distancing does not have to be observed.</p> <p>The 2 households that form a support bubble count as one household for the purposes of this guidance.</p>

Venue managers have discretion over when they consider it safe to open. The venue should decide to remain closed or not proceed with the reception or celebration if they are not able to safely adhere to the guidelines outlined below. Where the legislation requires that a venue does not open at this time then it must remain closed.

This guidance has been published alongside other specific guidance provided by government (all of which is subject to review and update), which should be used together to ensure public safety. These include:

- [Guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships](#)
- [Guidance for restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaway services](#)
- [Guidance for close contact services](#)
- [Guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities](#)
- [Guidance for hotel and other accommodation providers](#)
- [Guidance on performing arts](#)
- [Guidance on face coverings](#)
- [Guidance on maintaining records to support NHS Test and Trace](#)

3. Key principles

It is crucial that all staff, attendees and third-party suppliers visiting reception or celebration venues are not showing any symptoms of COVID-19. Anyone displaying symptoms should stay at home and get tested.

If anyone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 at a venue they should go home and be advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#). If they need clinical advice they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. They should not visit a GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital except for emergency access as above.

People who may have been in contact with a person who has become unwell should wash their hands thoroughly after the interaction, but they do not need to take any other specific action unless they develop symptoms themselves or are advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace. If they do develop symptoms they should follow the [stay at home guidance](#).

Receptions and celebrations must be a sit-down meal and only take place in a COVID-19 Secure environment/venue.

To address increasing virus transmission rates, from 24 September, the following additional legal restrictions apply:

- venues hosting wedding receptions and celebrations must be closed between 10pm and 5am. An exception to this is that attendees may stay overnight at the venue; and
- employers must not knowingly allow someone who is being required to self-isolate to come to work.

Social distancing measures

During all activities linked to the reception or celebration, all parties, especially people from separate households/bubbles, should adhere to social distancing guidelines; 2 metres or 1 metre with risk mitigation (where 2 metres is not viable). Venues and guest numbers should be chosen to ensure 2 metre spacing is possible for the main sections of the celebrations.

Wherever possible attendees should remain seated to support social distancing safety measures. They should be reminded at key points during the events to maintain social distancing and to avoid physical contact with individuals from different households.

Attendees and staff must wear a face covering (except when eating or drinking) in line with the [face coverings legislation](#) and [guidance on face coverings](#).

Employers must not, by law, prevent their staff or any other person present from wearing a face covering where they are required to do so.

Venue managers should provide hand sanitiser at convenient points throughout the venue, and encourage attendees to use it.

Attendees, including children, should frequently throughout the day wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap, or use hand sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered.

Any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean, should be removed or closed. [Outdoor playgrounds are permitted to open](#) where venue managers risk assess that it is safe to do so and ensure facilities are cleaned regularly. Particular attention should be paid to cleaning frequently touched surfaces and those that are at child height.

Serving and consuming food and drink

Staff should serve all food and drinks to minimise customer self-service, in line with the [guidance for restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaway services](#) and attendees should remain seated in hospitality settings.

Seating arrangements should follow social distancing guidance, meaning social distancing is maintained between different households (including any support bubbles). Businesses are required to maintain an appropriate distance between tables occupied by people who are not in the same qualifying group (i.e. a group from the same household, or from 2 linked households - see paragraph 4 below), which must be at least 2 metres, or if certain COVID-19 security measures are in place, at least 1 metre. Outdoor table service is also preferable.

In licensed premises, food and drink must be ordered from, and served to, customers who are seated. This means that a business that sells alcohol must introduce systems to take orders and payment from seated customers, instead of at a bar or counter. Any premises wishing to avoid this requirement would need to stop serving alcohol.

Businesses selling food or drink (licensed or not) must take all reasonable steps to prevent customers consuming food or drink on the premises unless they are seated. This means that in unlicensed premises, food and drink can be purchased or ordered at a counter, but customers must sit down to consume it, even in outdoor settings.

From 28 September, businesses are subject to further legal requirements to make their premises COVID-19 Secure.

Regulations now require certain businesses to implement specific aspects of this guidance, or face a fixed penalty notice of up to £10,000. The regulations require:

- that businesses where face coverings are required by law to be worn must inform people of the requirements in relation to face coverings, for instance using signage or taking other measures to ensure people are informed
- that pubs, cafes, restaurants, or bars, including members' bars or hotel bars, take all reasonable measures to stop customers singing in

groups of more than 6 (or other permitted groups, e.g a large household), and to stop dancing by customers (other than by the couple at a wedding or civil partnership), and ensure that no loud music is played, to minimise the need for customers to shout to communicate

Also from 28 September employers must not knowingly allow a worker (including where their worker is an agency worker) who is being required to self-isolate to come to work or attend any other place for work.

Entertainment

Dancing should not be permitted due to the increased risk of transmission and dancefloors may be repurposed for additional customer seating or other relevant purposes, ensuring this is in line with the social distancing guidelines. The only exception to this is the couple's 'first dance', which has been exempted from the regulations prohibiting dancing.

From 15 August 2020 socially distanced indoor and outdoor performances to a live audience, with strict social distancing arrangements in place, can take place in line with the [guidance on performing arts](#).

To minimise risk of droplet and aerosol transmission from the combined attendees including the performer/s, audience, wedding party and associated staff and site providers, outdoor performances are always preferable. Where any indoor performances are planned they should be limited in size, implement strict social distancing rules, only take place where high rates of air flow can be maintained, should use amplification systems to create volume rather than natural voices, and joining in. A solo or small number of performers is preferable and all should be socially distanced. Those planning the wedding should consider how the performers will impact the total size of the wedding party and therefore the safety of their event.

All venues should ensure that steps are taken to mitigate the increased risk of virus transmission associated with aerosol

production from raised voices, such as when speaking loudly or singing loudly, particularly in confined and poorly ventilated spaces. This includes, but is not limited to, lowering the volume of background music, and refraining from playing music or broadcasts that may encourage shouting, particularly if played at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult.

From 28 September businesses are required to take all reasonable measures to stop singing by customers in groups of more than 6 people (unless exemptions apply) and will be required to ensure music which exceeds 85db(A) at its source (except for performances of live music) are not allowed in law.

Other activities

Any other activities, including those that are watched by attendees (such as cake cutting) should take place with social distancing being maintained at all times and the numbers of guests involved limited wherever possible, with people remaining in their households/bubbles.

Activities that involve objects being thrown (such as confetti or bouquet toss) or passed from person to person should be avoided to reduce the likelihood of transmission.

Speeches should be undertaken outside or in well ventilated areas wherever possible. Ventilation with external air should be maximised in all buildings where people are gathering. For example, windows and doors should be opened as much as possible, and the sides of marquees removed or rolled up, throughout the event and when groups of staff are preparing and clearing away. Air conditioning systems using recirculated air are not advised. PA systems should be utilised wherever possible to help amplify speeches without speakers needing to raise their voices. Social distancing between the speaker and observers should be maintained at all times and neither speakers nor participants should raise their voices, to avoid the increased risk from aerosol transmission.

Where faith and belief marriage rituals or ceremonies are being undertaken under the legal provisions for a wedding reception, these

ceremonies must not exceed 15 people, and should adhere to all social distancing and other safety measures provided in this guidance. Those taking part in the ritual or ceremony do not need to remain seated at tables for this, but should be seated for any other aspects of a reception. If a faith or belief marriage ritual or ceremony is taking place as a wedding reception, it should take place within a reasonable timeframe alongside the legal solemnisation of the marriage.

Objects in the venue

Other objects in the venue being touched by several people (such as guest books or polaroid camera stations) should be minimised and hand sanitisation encouraged both before and after contact. The exchange of cards and gifts during receptions and celebrations should be minimised wherever possible.

Third-party suppliers

For suppliers present during the wedding reception or celebration, they and the venue managers should ensure that all activities undertaken are subject to a risk assessment and that they maintain social distancing during any activities the suppliers are responsible for.

Venue managers should ensure that all third-party suppliers follow the guidance on inbound and outbound goods as set out in the [guidance on restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaway services](#).

4. Guidance for venue managers

This guidance has been developed specifically for venues hosting wedding and civil partnership receptions and celebrations, and should be read in conjunction with other published COVID-19 Secure guidance (see above).

Restrictions on capacity

From 28 September 2020, capacity at a wedding or civil partnership reception or celebration (including the couple and guests) must be no more than 15, and should be safely accommodated with social distancing in a COVID-19 Secure venue. Tables must be 2 metres apart, or no more than 1 metre apart if there are COVID-19 Secure measures such as barriers, screens or other measures to limit transmission are taken.

Anyone working, for example officiants, staff employed by the venue, any third-party suppliers, photographers, security personnel, or catering staff, are not included in this figure. Wedding receptions and celebrations are one of the few exceptions to the gatherings limit of 6 people, which has applied from 14 September 2020.

5. Test and Trace

Opening up of the economy and public services is reliant on NHS Test and Trace being used to minimise transmission of the virus. In order to ensure that businesses and local services are able to remain open, we are now mandating that organisations in designated sectors (see [guidance on maintaining records to support NHS Test and Trace](#)):

- ask at least one member of every party of customers or visitors (up to 6 people) to provide their name and contact details
- keep a record of the contact details for all suppliers visiting the venue on a given day, including those visiting prior to or following the event
- keep a record of all staff working on their premises and shift times on a given day and their contact details
- keep these records of customers, visitors, suppliers and staff for 21 days and provide data to NHS Test and Trace or other local public health officials if requested
- display an official NHS QR code poster so that customers and visitors can 'check in' using this option as an alternative to providing their contact details; and
- adhere to General Data Protection Regulations.

In addition, the hospitality sector will be required to ensure that anyone visiting pubs, restaurants and other venues provides their

contact information or checks in using the official NHS QR code before being allowed entry to the venue.

Any designated venue that is found not to be compliant with these regulations will be subject to financial penalties. It is vital that relevant venues comply with these regulations to help keep people safe, and to keep businesses open.

6. Enforcement

Where the enforcing authority, such as the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or your local authority, identifies employers or venues who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation to control public health risks, or with health and safety legislation, they are empowered to take a range of actions to improve control of venue risks. Enforcement officers will take relevant guidance into account.

Failure to complete a risk assessment which takes account of COVID-19, or completing a risk assessment but failing to put in place sufficient measures to manage the risk of COVID-19, could constitute a breach of existing [health and safety legislation](#). A wedding or civil partnership reception is only exempted from the rule of 6 limit if a risk assessment has been carried out as required by the relevant regulations.

The actions the enforcing authority can take include the provision of specific advice to venues to support them to achieve the required standard, through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements. Breaches of the legal requirements and failure to comply with enforcement notices can constitute a criminal offence, with serious fines and even imprisonment for up to 2 years. Penalties increase for repeated breaches under the various regulations in place for coronavirus measures. There is also a wider system of enforcement, which includes specific obligations and conditions for licensed premises.

Venue managers are expected to respond to any advice or notices issued by enforcing authorities rapidly and are required to do so within any timescales imposed by the enforcing authorities. Our expectation is that venues and venue managers will act responsibly and join with the UK's fight against COVID-19 by working with the government and

their sector bodies to protect their workers and the public. However, regulators are carrying out compliance checks nationwide to ensure that employers and venues are taking the necessary steps.