

# Christmas bubbles and Shared Lives



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## About this document

This document offers clarity on what the Christmas mixing regulations are across the nations, and what this means for Shared Lives over the Christmas period.

Between the 23 and 27 December, we will all be allowed to form “Christmas bubbles” of up to three separate households. The UK Government and the Devolved Administrations have agreed an aligned approach, meaning that the basic rules of the Christmas bubbles will apply in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

**Please note:** whilst it is legally possible for people supported by Shared Lives to visit family and other households as part of the “Christmas bubble” system (as outlined in the [“Christmas mixing regulations”](#) section), we strongly advise Shared Lives schemes to conduct specific risk assessments and ensure that all parties involved are aware of the risks and happy with any arrangements put in place. Please see the [“Applying Christmas mixing regulations to Shared Lives”](#) section below for more information.

## Christmas mixing regulations

### Nation specific guidance

The basic principles of the Christmas mixing regulations are the same in all four nations. However, you can find more detail on the approach taken in each nation in the links below;

- **England:**
  - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family>
  - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-the-christmas-period>

- **Wales:** <https://gov.wales/making-christmas-bubble-friends-and-family>
- **Scotland:** <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-festive-period>
- **Northern Ireland:** <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-restrictions-christmas>

## Nation-wide rules

The principles of the Christmas mixing regulations in all four nations are that;

- Up to **three separate households** can form a bubble between 23 and 27 December
- Christmas bubbles will **have to be exclusive** over the five-day period, meaning people cannot move from one three-house group to another
- A Christmas bubble will be able to spend time together in private homes, including second homes and caravans, to attend places of worship, or meet in a public outdoor place.
  - It is not possible to meet socially with friends and family in a private home or garden, unless they are part of the Christmas bubble
- People are advised to **reduce unnecessary contact** with those they do not live with **two weeks before** they join a bubble to minimise transmission risks
- You are not allowed to form a Christmas bubble if you have coronavirus symptoms or are self-isolating

## Members of the same household can be in different bubbles between the 23 and 27 December.

The [government guidance](#) states that;

"If you and the people you are living with want to be in different Christmas bubbles, you can choose to stay somewhere else with different people for this period and form a Christmas bubble with that household and one other household (this will count as three households)."

The guidance also states that;

"If you have chosen to form a different Christmas bubble from other people in your household - the people you live with normally - you should take additional steps to prevent the opportunity for the virus to spread within your household, and between bubbles. This might include staying

with another member of your Christmas bubble between 23 and 27 December where possible.”

**To clarify;**

- A person living in a long-term Shared Lives arrangement, their Shared Lives carer(s), and any other members of the household count as one household
- If the person being supported wishes to go somewhere else for Christmas (i.e. to stay with their family), they can do so.
  - They will be counted as one household for the purposes of their Christmas bubble, with their family forming one other household in the bubble.
  - The person being supported, and their family can then add one more household to form a complete Christmas bubble.
- Meanwhile, the Shared Lives carer’s household will be able to form a bubble with two other households.
- The person supported by Shared Lives and the Shared Lives carers plus the rest of their household would be in **two separate Christmas bubbles, even though they are from one household.**
- The government guidance does not prohibit members of the same household from seeing one another even if they are in separate bubbles, however it does urge that anyone doing so takes “extra precautions such as cleaning surfaces and contact points like door handles and letting in as much fresh air as possible after someone has visited your household.”

## **Social distancing and limiting contact within bubbles**

In **England**, the government has stated that social distancing will not be necessary in the Christmas bubbles.

However, the Scottish government has advised that “you should keep the numbers within a bubble as low as possible and minimise the duration of contact between different households as much as possible,” and that “wherever possible keep 2m away from people not in your usual household.”

The Scottish government also recommends that any bubble be kept to a maximum of 8 people (excluding children).

## Infection prevention and control

The [guidance for England](#) states that when meeting other households within a Christmas bubble, you should take these measures to prevent the spread of the virus:

- wash your hands frequently
- clean touch points regularly, such as door handles and surfaces

The [Scottish government guidance](#) further adds that you can help reduce the risk of spreading the virus by taking measures such as;

- letting in as much fresh air as you can both during and after a visit
- avoid sharing cutlery or crockery if possible

For more information about infection prevention and control in Shared Lives settings, see our document "PPE and infection control: Winter 2020-21" in the "[Covid-19 during autumn and winter 2020-21](#)" section in the member's area of our website.

## Isolation periods

The UK government has **not issued any guidance specifying that a period of isolation need be observed** for those returning to another/their original household after the Christmas bubbles are ended.

The **English** [government guidance](#) does state that;

"if a member of your Christmas bubble tests positive for coronavirus or develops coronavirus symptoms between the 23 and 27 December, or up to 48 hours after members of the bubble last met, all members of the bubble must [self-isolate](#) as if they were members of the same household."

The **Scottish** government states in their [Christmas mixing guidance](#) that,

"if someone in your bubble develops COVID-19 symptoms, to avoid spreading the virus all members of the bubble must isolate immediately if they met the symptomatic person at any time between 2 days before and up to 10 days after their symptoms started. If the symptomatic person tests positive, all members of the bubble must isolate for 14 days from the start of symptoms or from when the

most recent contact took place. Isolate means staying in your own home or the home you are staying in for the full 14 days.”

The **Northern Irish** [government states](#) that;

“if anyone in the Christmas bubble tests positive for Covid-19, all members of the bubble will be required to isolate for 14 days”

The **Welsh** [government guidance](#) simply states that you must follow the existing rules on self-isolation if you develop symptoms or test positive for coronavirus.

For the general government guidance on what to do if a person develops symptoms or test positive for Covid-19, see:

- **England:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>
- **Wales:** <https://gov.wales/self-isolation-stay-home-guidance-households-possible-coronavirus>
- **Scotland:** <https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/#testandprotect:gettingtestedandself-isolating>
- **Northern Ireland:** <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-self-isolating>

## Applying Christmas mixing regulations to Shared Lives

### Discussing risks with people supported by Shared Lives

Shared Lives schemes must ensure that the person or persons being supported by Shared Lives are happy with the arrangements for the Christmas bubble period, and that they understand the potential risks.

Shared Lives schemes should presume that the person being supported has the mental capacity to make the decision of where they want to spend Christmas, and that they understand the risks around Covid-19.

Where there is doubt that the person is not able to make this decision, a mental capacity assessment may be required which will allow a best interest decision to be made on their behalf.

## **Discussing risks with Shared Lives carers and their household**

Shared Lives schemes should discuss Christmas bubble plans and arrangements with the Shared Lives carer(s) and members of their household. It is important that everyone is informed and able to agree to the arrangements taking place. Shared Lives schemes should ensure that Shared Lives households;

- Understand the potential risks of a person being supported by Shared Lives leaving and returning to the household between the 23 and 27 December
- Are comfortable with these arrangements taking place

If a Shared Lives carer or member of their household is not comfortable with the risks, for example because they are clinically at risk, then the Shared Lives scheme must put in place a [contingency plan](#).

## **Risk assessment**

Shared Lives schemes should conduct thorough and specific risk assessments in relation to any Christmas bubble arrangements. Some questions that a Shared Lives scheme risk assessment may ask include;

- What are the hazards/risks?
- Who might be harmed and how?
  - For example, are there any members of the Shared Lives carers household who are clinically at greater risk from Covid-19? The governments of all four nations have stressed that the decision to make a bubble must be weighed against the risks to older adults and those with underlying health conditions.
- What is in place already to mitigate risk?

- For example, have the household who will be hosting the person supported by Shared Lives agreed to observe infection prevention and control practices during their stay?
- What else needs to be put in place to reduce/control the risk?
  - For example, will the Shared Lives carer and the person being supported agree to limit who they see outside their three-household bubble during the Christmas bubble period to reduce the risk of getting Covid-19?

## Contingency planning

Shared Lives schemes should make contingency plans for what will happen if;

- someone contracts Covid-19 during their time in a Christmas bubble
- someone has close contact with a person either suspect of having Covid-19, or who has tested positive for Covid-19, during the Christmas bubble period
- If any member of the Shared Lives carer's household or the person supported by Shared Lives expresses discomfort at reuniting as a household after the Christmas bubble has ended

It is important that the Shared Lives scheme discusses this contingency plan with the Shared Lives carers, the person being supported, and their family members.

## Contact

If you have any queries regarding this document, please contact Shared Lives Plus;

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