# Sighted guiding (England)

23 September 2020

## Introduction

The principles below are intended for all blind and partially sighted individuals who require sighted guiding assistance, and have been developed in partnership by RNIB, Guide Dogs and Thomas Pocklington Trust. They are based on guidance in force in England on 22 September 2020 but people should stay up to date with [what you can and can’t do](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do) and more detailed [current government COVID-19 advice](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus), as guidance is subject to change. In the case of any ambiguity, government-issued guidance should always take precedence.

“[Supporting people outside their home](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-people-outside-of-their-home)” guidance allows for support from family or friends in the same household or support bubble, or by family and friends that don’t live as a household or support bubble if that’s not possible, and by volunteers or staff of organisations, such as supermarkets, transport hubs or hospitals. This includes sighted guiding.

Sighted guiding provides support for someone whose sight is not sufficient to safely negotiate an unfamiliar environment, from another person. Ordinarily it involves the person being guided keeping light contact with a guider’s elbow, standing alongside and slightly behind to the left or right, depending on personal preference. While moving, the guider will also talk to the person being guided to provide additional information about any immediate hazards.

Government guidance is written so that it will still be applicable if restrictions are reimposed as part of a local lockdown, to allow sighted guiding to continue while reducing risk as far as is possible.

Staff or volunteers providing sighted guiding support should first follow their organisation’s policies and guidance in doing so.

## 1. Protecting different groups of people

This advice is aimed at all blind and partially sighted people, and sighted guiders who are fit and well, confident about guiding practice, and following [Staying alert and safe guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing) and, if appropriate, their own organisation’s guidance.

Clinically vulnerable blind and partially sighted people should take extra care with hygiene and distancing while being guided in public. A sighted guider should be able to help with maintaining social distancing (keeping two metres away from people, or one metre with additional precautions) while outside the house.

Extremely clinically vulnerable people, who were previously shielding, should follow guidance currently aimed at clinically vulnerable people. They are currently able to leave their house, and form support bubbles but, again, with extra care taken to minimise risks as far as possible, including social distancing.

## 2. Guiding should only be used for journeys and activities that are permitted

Getting out and about is important for physical and mental health, and essential tasks, but needs to be balanced with the current risks posed by transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Only those journeys and activities permitted in government guidance on [what you can and can’t do](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do) should be made.

While outside the house, guidelines for [Meeting with others safely (social distancing)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing) should be followed.

## 3. Form a support bubble, if you can

It is safer to get support, including sighted guiding, from someone inside your household or a support bubble, as described in [Making a support bubble with another household](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household) guidance, if this is possible for you.

There are no restrictions on distancing or contact between members of a support bubble, but advice in section 4 and 5 of this guidance should still be observed.

Care needs to be taken in choosing who to form a “support bubble” with as, once selected, it cannot be changed or added to. A person who needs guiding could choose a friend or family member, or a personal assistant if one is employed using direct payments or Access to Work.

## 4. What everyone should do to minimise the risks while guiding

Everyone will need to follow general advice on reducing the spread of coronavirus, by:

* keeping good hand hygiene and washing them more frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds, or using hand sanitizer, particularly whenever you enter or leave a building, touch a surface, and before and after putting a face covering on or off, or touching your face;
* avoiding touching the face unnecessarily, particularly eyes, nose and mouth;
* catching coughs and sneezes in the crook of the elbow of your free arm, or a disposable tissue, and then immediately disposing of it in a waste (not recycling) bin and washing or sanitising hands;
* socially distancing from other people, whenever possible, and limiting contact with too many different people, in line with [what you can and can’t do](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do) guidance;
* restricting number of people guiding and being guided as far as is possible. Ideally, this should be a one-to-one relationship;
* including a sighted guider when calculating the number of people in a group, when meeting people you do not live with;
* observing current [guidance on the use of face coverings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own), particularly when inside or travelling on public transport or taxis and unable to socially distance from other people; and
* observing any [local restrictions that might be in force](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/local-restrictions-areas-with-an-outbreak-of-coronavirus-covid-19).

## 5. Minimising risks on the journey

Risks of transmission can be lowered by reducing the number of people that you come into close contact with. This is particularly important if the person being guided is clinically vulnerable.

Journeys should be planned to avoid crowded areas, and peak times on public transport, where possible. The guider should take similar precautions on the journey to and from the house of the person being guided.

## 6. What people outside a household or support bubble can do to minimise risks while guiding

Outside of a support bubble sighted guiding is still possible by taking precautions additional to those listed above, to reduce the risk of being closer than two metres, by:

* keeping guiding sessions as short as reasonably possible;
* avoiding face-to-face contact as much as possible;
* the person guiding should, if possible, meet and drop off the person being guided at the door of their house and must not enter if to do so would increase the number of people there beyond six;
* wearing a face covering while together, whether indoors or outdoors, and otherwise observe current [guidance on the use of face coverings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own);
* keeping the number of people that are involved as low as possible;
* if you have to travel by car, the guider should follow [safer travel guidance for passengers](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#private-cars-and-other-vehicles); and
* if using a guiding aid, cleaning this with a sanitising wipe before and after use.

## 7. What people providing guiding support to customers can do

“Supporting people outside their home” establishes the principle that volunteers and staff from organisations such as supermarkets, transport hubs and hospitals can provide sighted guiding support. Staff or volunteers involved should follow their own organisation’s policies and guidance, which should include the mitigation advice set out above in sections 4, 5 and 6.

In addition, people needing sighted guiding support should:

* where possible, book support in advance;
* set out what support you need;
* be prepared to give your name and contact details; and
* if contacted by NHS Test and Trace, follow their advice.

The organisation providing the support should:

* have already followed guidance for [working safely during coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19) to minimise risks for staff and customers;
* have provided any necessary training and equipment to their staff;
* on the day, check the person being supported hasn’t got COVID-19 symptoms and hasn’t been advised to stay at home or quarantine themselves, before providing support; and
* maintain records of the people who have been supported by each member of staff for 21 days and be prepared to provide this information to NHS Test and Trace, if needed.

## 8. No guiding is possible while self-isolating with symptoms or quarantining

If either the person being guided or guider develops COVID-19 symptoms, then [Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection) must be followed. If in a support bubble, all people in both households must follow this guidance.

If they are able to, all parties should follow [Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested) guidance. No guiding will be possible while self-isolating or quarantining, or until tests prove negative.

## 9. Additional resources

You should keep up to date with advice from [RNIB’s Coronavirus updates](https://www.rnib.org.uk/coronavirus-updates), and the [Sight Advice FAQs](https://www.sightadvicefaq.org.uk/) website. Both provide information for blind and partially sighted people on how to adjust to living with the impact of coronavirus restrictions.

The [Guide Dogs coronavirus section](https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/covid19) has information for blind and partially sighted people, and for those who support them, and has tips for getting out and about.

[Sight Loss Councils](https://www.sightlosscouncils.org.uk/resources), supported by the Thomas Pocklington Trust, have an online resources section with a range of guides that may be useful.

## Contact

For further information please contact

### Email: [campaigns@RNIB.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@RNIB.org.uk)

### Telephone RNIB’s Helpline: 0303 123 9999