# Sighted guiding (England)

17 May 2021

## 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 17 May 2021 but people should stay up to date with “[Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do)” and more detailed [current government COVID-19 advice](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus), as guidance is subject to change. This is particularly important as new variants of the virus arise, and affected locations may be subject to additional guidance.

In the case of any ambiguity, government-issued guidance should always take precedence. **You should continue to follow all government coronavirus guidance, even if you’ve been vaccinated against COVID-19.**

“[Getting help with daily activities outside your home during coronavirus](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 explicitly 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.

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 [Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do) and, if appropriate, their own organisation’s guidance.

Extremely clinically vulnerable blind and partially sighted people, who were previously shielding, should still continue to take extra precautions to protect themselves, and follow “[Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19)”. 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 their house.

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

You should continue to be careful when travelling. You can meet up to 30 people outdoors, and up to six people from one other household (which can include people in yours and their support bubbles) indoors, while following “[Meeting friends and family guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-friends-and-family-covid-19)”.

**Government guidance emphasises personal responsibility, and encourages you to exercise appropriate caution,** consideringcurrent guidance on COVID-19 risks, and the actions you can take to help keep you, your family and friends safe, particularly those who were previously shielding.

While there are now fewer restrictions on travel, only journeys to those venues and activities permitted in [Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do) should be undertaken.

As per [Getting help with daily activities](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-people-outside-of-their-home), a guider is not counted towards any limits on gatherings currently in force, but **only** for the duration of any sighted guiding support. Once guiding activities are finished, a guider must move to a safe, permitted location until needed to guide again, or they must be counted as part of a gathering.

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

It is still safest 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, and those within a support bubble can be considered as a single household if meeting with another household outdoors, 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 changing between bubbles requires a 10-day self-isolation period for all involved. 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 involved should continue to follow “[How to stop the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19/how-to-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-covid-19)” guidance, even after being vaccinated, 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 indoors, whenever possible, and limiting contact with too many different people;
* 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 or households in a gathering, if they do not move away to somewhere safe once they have finished guiding;
* 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.

## 5. Minimising risks on the journey

You should follow “[Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers)”. Risks of transmission can be lowered by reducing the number of people that you come into close contact with. Even though shielding is currently suspended, this is still important if the person being guided is clinically vulnerable.

Journeys should be planned to avoid 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 household or support bubble, sighted guiding is still possible by taking precautions additional to those listed in sections 4 and 5, 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;
* ensuring good ventilation when together indoors, if possible;
* 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

[Getting help with daily activities outside your home](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-people-outside-of-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:

* be following 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