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Covid: stop 'Ventilating our homes will help stop others being infected'

LIFE IS GETTING BACK TO NORMAL, BUT COVID-19 IS STILL OUT THERE. HERE'S HOW SIMPLE STEPS SUCH AS WEARING A FACE COVERING, GETTING TESTED AND LETTING FRESH AIR INTO YOUR HOME CAN HELP PROTECT YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONES

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The future looks a lot brighter than it did this time last year thanks to the vaccination rollout, but Covid is still here so we must do our bit to prevent its transmission. Cold and flu season always puts pressure on the NHS, and although the Covid vaccines are the best line of defence against the virus, you can still catch it even if you're fully vaccinated. You can spread it to others too, and what might be no worse than a cold for you could spell danger to more vulnerable people.

Cases are already high after the return to school and university, and as people return to the workplace and socialise indoors, they could rise further. But there are some simple steps you can take to stay safe...

Let fresh air in

You're much more likely to catch Covid-19 indoors, especially in a confined space with no ventilation. The risk isn't just about being near other people – mixing indoors can lead to a build-up of the virus in the atmosphere.

Meeting outdoors is safer, but that's not always possible when it's cold and raining. So whether you're at home or at work, let fresh air in wherever you can. Leave vents open and windows ajar. If you're having visitors round, open the windows for ten minutes before, during and after. Don't worry about losing heat from the house if you give it a good blast of fresh air – it will soon build up again.

Wear a face covering

One in three people with Covid19 has no symptoms – and you can still get it if you're fully vaccinated, so it makes sense to wear a face covering indoors whenever you can. Although the rules no longer require you to do so in some indoor settings, you're protecting others when you wear it. Make sure it covers both your mouth and nose because if you do have Covid-19, you can release contagious droplets every time you breathe out.

So next time you hop on the bus or pop to the shop, think about wearing a face covering to protect those around you – and hopefully they'll be doing the same.

Get tested

Taking regular rapid lateral flow tests gives you peace of mind – they're free, easy to do and give results within 30 minutes. Go to nhs.uk/get-tested or call 119 to order a pack. They're also available at some pharmacies: first visit gov.uk/getcollect-code to get a code that you will need to show when you collect them.

You may also wish to consider taking a test if you're likely to be in a higher-risk situation that day – for example, mixing in a crowded indoor space such as a nightclub, or visiting vulnerable people. Doing a test will reassure you that you are unlikely to be infectious with Covid19. If you do test positive, you can take action to help stop the virus spreading. Let's send our children back to school safely.

"It is a very good test," says Public Health England's Susan Hopkins. "Rapid lateral flow devices are effective at finding people with high viral loads who are most likely to transmit the virus to others."

It's important to report all test results, whether they're positive, negative or void, because that helps identify outbreaks early – you can do this at gov.uk/report-covid19result, or call 119 free from your mobile or landline.

Take a test if you think you have Covid

If you have symptoms (a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, or a loss or change to your sense of smell and taste) you must take a PCR test immediately, which you can book online. Even if your symptoms are mild or you're not sure, it's worth getting tested. You can either go to a local test centre or you will be sent a PCR test to do at home. Don't leave home until you get the result, and if you test positive you'll need to self-isolate from the day your symptoms started (or the day you had the test if you're asymptomatic) for ten days.

NHS Test and Trace will continue to protect the public this winter, by helping to break the chains of transmission – and they will inform you if you've been in close contact with someone who's tested positive for Covid. If they contact you, they'll tell you exactly what you need to do, so just follow their advice.

Keep up to date with your jabs

Vaccination is the best defence against serious Covid-related illness. You can still get Covid and pass it on if you're vaccinated, but it's a vital step to keep yourself safe. Make sure you book your Covid and flu jabs when invited. This autumn, Covid booster jabs are being offered to more vulnerable groups such as people over 50, over-16s with certain health conditions and frontline health and social care workers, including those who work in care homes.

Catherine Noakes, professor of environmental engineering, Leeds University

"As winter approaches, people will naturally spend more time indoors – welcoming friends and family into their home as the weather gets colder. While we've all been looking forward to this for so long, it's important to remember that coronavirus is still around us, and can easily spread in the home. "If someone is infected (and remember they might be showing no symptoms), Covid-19 particles are released into the air by coughing, talking or simply breathing. In an enclosed space, those infectious particles can build up over time and remain suspended in the air, increasing the risk of other people in the room breathing them in – especially if there is no ventilation or fresh air helping to refresh the air being breathed.

"With this in mind, as we meet more people inside, it's so important to use ventilation such as opening a window, even for just a short time, so fresh air can disperse and blow Covid-19 particles away and decrease the risk of others being infected."