



Falkland Islands Government

Public Health Guidance – April 2022

COVID-19 remains a risk

COVID-19 will be a feature of our lives for the foreseeable future, so we need to learn to live with it and manage the risk to ourselves and others. It is also possible to catch and spread COVID-19, even if you are fully vaccinated.

If you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 or receive a positive test result, then our public health advice is to stay at home and avoid contact with people.

We all need to play our part in understanding where and when the risks of COVID-19 infection and transmission are likely to be higher, and what we can do to reduce these risks.

Following this public health guidance will help you to identify situations where there is a greater risk of catching or spreading COVID-19, and what steps you can take to stay safe and protect others. **Every positive action you take will help to reduce the spread of the virus.**

1. Understanding the risks of COVID-19

COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease, and the risk of catching it or passing it on very much depends on how we act when going about our daily lives. The most significant way the virus spreads is through airborne transmission, although close contact and surface contact can also result in the disease spreading. It is also possible to be infected by someone you have not had close contact with, especially if you're in a crowded and/or poorly ventilated space.

When someone with COVID-19 breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes, they release particles containing the virus that causes COVID-19. These particles may then come into contact with the eyes, nose or mouth of another person or can be breathed in by them; particles can also land on surfaces and be passed from person to person via touch.

In general, the risk of catching or passing on COVID-19 is higher in crowded and enclosed spaces, where there are more people who might be infectious and limited fresh air. In situations where there is a higher risk of catching or passing on COVID-19, you should be particularly careful to follow the guidance on keeping yourself and others safe.

2. Keeping yourself and others safe

We will soon see cases of COVID-19 within the community in the Falkland Islands, which means there is a risk that you could catch or pass on the virus, even if you are fully

vaccinated. This means it is important that you understand and consider the risks of catching or spreading COVID-19 in all situations in order to keep yourself and others safe.

While no situation is risk-free, there are easy and effective actions you can take to protect yourself and others around you. You can:

- wear a mask in public spaces
- continue to maintain good hygiene practices e.g. washing your hands regularly, sneezing into the crook of your arm etc.
- keep windows open when in a room with others
- stay at home if you have flu-like symptoms or test positive for COVID-19
- consider not attending events where you know there will be a lot of people if you are feeling unwell.

Many people will feel worried about returning to a more 'normal' life, which is completely natural and understandable. You may feel particularly anxious or scared about the fact that border controls are changing and you may fear COVID-19 'getting into the community'. It is ok to feel this way and the KEMH team is on hand to help and support you with these feelings. If you are struggling to cope and need to speak to someone, then please contact the KEMH on 28000. You might also want to consider looking at some online support, such as Every Mind Matters, <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/coronavirus/mental-wellbeing-while-staying-at-home/>

3. Get vaccinated

All eligible groups here in the Falklands have now been offered at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and all eligible adults have also been offered a booster. **Vaccines are safe and effective, and getting yourself a full course of vaccination is the best way of protecting yourself and others against COVID-19.**

If you have not yet received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, we strongly recommend that you get vaccinated. Evidence indicates that two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine provides good protection against severe illness, including against the Omicron variant of the disease, but this protection declines slowly over time. Boosters also provide a high level of protection against Omicron, so you are advised to get a COVID-19 booster if you haven't done so yet.

While vaccines, particularly booster doses, provide a high level of protection against severe disease, hospitalisation and death, it is still possible to get COVID-19 and to pass it to others. **We all need to do what we can to reduce the spread of COVID-19 to protect others and to reduce the risk of new variants.**

4. Let fresh air in if you meet indoors – meeting outdoors is safer

When a person infected with COVID-19 coughs, talks, or breathes, they release droplets and aerosols which can be breathed in by another person. Meeting outdoors vastly reduces the risk of airborne transmission. However, if you are indoors, then you should ensure that you

let fresh air inside to reduce the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19. This is particularly important before, during, and after meeting with people you do not live with.

5. Consider wearing a face covering (also see page 8)

COVID-19 spreads through the air by droplets and aerosols that are exhaled from the nose and mouth of an infected person. While it is not a legal requirement to wear a face covering, public health advice suggests you might want to consider wearing one in crowded and enclosed spaces, especially where you come into contact with people you do not usually meet, particularly when infection rates are high. Masks are available on sale in most retail outlets in Stanley and will be available for anyone attending the KEMH.

6. Get tested and stay at home if you have symptoms

If you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test result, the public health advice is to stay at home and avoid contact with other people.

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are the recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)
- a sore throat
- diarrhoea, vomiting or muscle aches and pains.

If you have any of these symptoms you should contact the KEMH on 28000 to arrange to take a test– this will not only provide you with peace of mind, but will also help us to track possible spread of the disease. You are also advised to stay at home, avoid contact with other people, and follow the guidance for people with COVID-19 and their contacts, while you wait for your test result.

There are different tests you can get to check if you have COVID-19. The test you need depends on why you're getting tested. The two main tests are:

- PCR tests – mainly for people **with symptoms**, these are sent to the hospital lab to be checked
- Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests – these are usually for people **who do not have symptoms**, they give a quick result using a device similar to a pregnancy test.

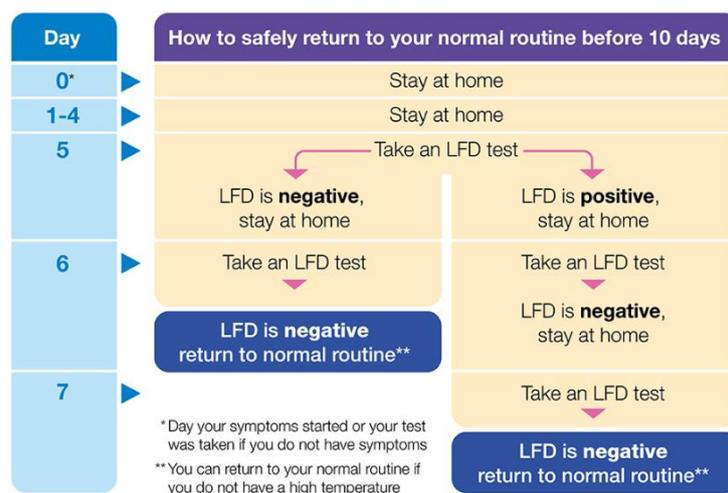
7. If you have COVID-19, stay at home and avoid contact with other people

If you have COVID-19 you can infect other people from 2 days before your symptoms start, and for up to 10 days after. You can pass on the infection to others, even if you have mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. If you have COVID-19 you should therefore stay at home and avoid contact with other people; you should also follow this advice if you test positive, even if you do not have any symptoms.

You should:

- not attend work – if you can't work from home, please talk to your employer about your options
- ask family, friends or neighbours to get food and other essentials for you
- do not invite social visitors into your home, including friends and family
- postpone all non-essential services and repairs that require a home visit
- cancel routine medical and dental appointments – if you are concerned about your health or you have been asked to attend an appointment in person then please discuss this with KEMH and let us know about your symptoms or your test result
- tell the people who you have been in close contact with about your positive test result so that they can also follow this guidance.

Many people will no longer be infectious after 5 days. You may choose to take an LFD test from 5 days after your symptoms started (or the day your test was taken if you did not have symptoms) followed by another LFD test the next day. If **both** test results are negative, and you do not have a high temperature, the risk that you are still infectious is much lower and you can safely return to your normal routine. If positive, report your result to the KEMH by emailing surveillance@kemh.gov.fk or calling 28000.



If you are unsure what to do, please contact the KEMH on 28000.

8. If you have no other option but to leave your home

The most effective way to avoid passing on COVID-19 infection is to stay at home and avoid contact with other people. However, we understand that in some cases this is not always possible, but you should still try to follow the guidance as closely as possible. If you have COVID-19 and you really, really need to leave your home while you are still infectious – you should take the following steps to reduce the chance of passing on the infection to others:

- Wear a well-fitting face covering made with multiple layers, or a surgical face mask
- Avoid close contact with anyone you know who is at higher risk of becoming severely unwell, especially those with a severely weakened immune system
- Avoid crowded places and using taxis

- Avoid large social gatherings and events, or anywhere poorly ventilated, crowded, or enclosed
- Limit close contact with other people outside your household as much as possible – meet outside and try and stay at least 2 metres apart from them
- Take any exercise outdoors in places where you will not have contact with others
- Be especially careful with your hand and respiratory hygiene.

Ultimately, we are all responsible for doing everything that we can to stop the spread of the disease – the best way to do this is to stay at home and away from other people.

9. Stay at home if you're feeling unwell

If you feel unwell but do not have COVID-19 symptoms, or your test is negative, you may still have an illness which could be passed on to other people. Many common illnesses, like the flu, the common cold or diarrhoea and vomiting bugs, can quickly spread from one person to another. This can happen:

- when someone infected with an illness breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes, releasing respiratory particles which can cause infection in another person
- through surfaces and belongings which can become contaminated when people who are infected with an illness cough or sneeze near them or if they touch them, then the next person to touch that surface may become infected

Staying at home until you feel better reduces the risk that you will pass on an illness to others in our community and will also help reduce the burden on our health services.

10. Consider taking a test, even if you do not have symptoms

Around 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 do not have any symptoms. This means they could be spreading the virus without knowing it. Lateral Flow Devices (LFDs) can be used to detect COVID-19 when you are infectious but are not displaying symptoms, helping you to make sure you do not spread the disease by avoiding contact with others, particularly those who are at higher risk.

LFDs are available at the KEMH and are free of charge; you may wish to take LFDs as a way to manage your personal risk and the risk to those around you. This may be particularly important before visiting people who are at higher risk of severe illness if they get COVID-19, e.g. the elderly, pregnant women, the unvaccinated, or those who have certain medical conditions or who are on certain medications that cause a weakened immune system.

If you receive a positive result, please report this to the KEMH by emailing surveillance@kemh.gov.fk and stay at home and avoid contact with others. Certain places, such as the KEMH or Hillside House, will have their own specific testing rules and guidance, and you should make sure that you are aware of this guidance if you visit or work in these places – please call before visiting to find out.

11. Wash your hands regularly and cover coughs and sneezes

During this time, you are advised to wash your hands with soap and water, or use hand sanitiser, regularly throughout the day. Regular hand washing is an effective way to reduce your risk of catching illnesses, including COVID-19. It is particularly important to wash your hands:

- after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose
- before you eat or handle food
- after coming into contact with surfaces touched by many others, such as handles, handrails and light switches
- after coming into contact with shared areas such as kitchens and bathrooms
- when you return home.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. If you do need to touch your face, for example, to put on or take off a face covering, wash or sanitise your hands before and after. Coughing and sneezing increases the number of droplets released by a person, the distance they travel and the time they stay in the air. Covering coughs and sneezes will help reduce the spread of particles carrying COVID-19 and other viruses.

12. Working from home

People should talk to their employers to discuss what arrangements could be put in place in terms of your employment in the weeks ahead, as you may be advised to work from home if possible. It is also important that you understand your own personal risk in different settings and scenarios

- **If you were previously identified as clinically extremely vulnerable or high risk**

Following scientific clinical advice and the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme, most people previously considered to be very high risk, or high risk, are not being advised to shield again. **If you were previously identified as being in a high-risk group, you should continue to follow this guidance on this page and take advice from the KEMH on whether additional precautions are right for you.**

If you are pregnant

Pregnant women who are unvaccinated, or not fully vaccinated, are at higher risk of becoming severely ill and of experiencing a pre-term birth if they contract COVID-19. The UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has advised that pregnant women should be included as a clinical risk group within the vaccination programme. **You are strongly recommended to get your COVID-19 vaccinations if you are pregnant or breastfeeding as soon as possible. You should not delay vaccination until after you have given birth.**

COVID-19 vaccines available in the UK have been shown to be effective and to have a good safety profile. Over 100,000 pregnant women have been vaccinated to date. It is very

important to have your COVID-19 vaccinations to protect you and your baby, so please discuss any concerns with your midwife.

13. Face coverings

- **What is a face covering?**

In the context of COVID-19, a face covering is something that safely covers the nose and mouth. Face coverings are primarily worn to protect others *because* they cover your nose and mouth, which are the main sources of emission of the virus that causes coronavirus infection. Equally, they can also provide some protection to the wearer, particularly in situations where they need to mix or interact with others.

- **What makes a good face covering?**

Face coverings work best if they are made with multiple layers (at least two and preferably three) and form a good fit around the nose and mouth. Scarves, bandanas or religious garments are likely to be less effective if they do not fit securely around the mouth and nose, and only have a single layer.

Valved masks or those with vents are **not** recommended as they do not filter exhaled air, so do not provide the required level of protection.

- **What is the difference between face coverings and face masks?**

Face coverings are not classified as personal protective equipment (PPE). Face masks are classified as PPE and are used in a limited number of settings to protect wearers against hazards and risks, such as surgical masks, or respirators used in medical and industrial settings.

- **When to wear a face covering**

There is no legal requirement to wear a face covering. However, public health advice suggests that you may want to consider wearing a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces, where you may come into contact with people you do not normally meet. For example, customers, visitors or staff may choose to wear face coverings in any setting.

Face coverings and face masks will continue to be required in health and care settings to comply with infection prevention and control (IPC) guidance. This includes KEMH, GP clinics and community care settings, such as Hillside House, or during home visits. For the time being, they must also be worn by everyone accessing or visiting health and care settings, you will be asked to wear a face covering on entering these premises and must keep it on until you leave. In due course, advice will be released as to when this will no longer be necessary.

If you have any questions about the information contained within this guidance document, please contact KEMH on **28000**.