

1. Home (<https://www.gov.uk/>)
 2. Coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon>)
 3. Driving and transport in the UK during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/driving-and-transport-in-the-uk>)
 4. Coronavirus (COVID-19): General Aviation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-aviation>)
- Department for Transport (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport>)

Guidance

Coronavirus (COVID-19): General Aviation

Updated 4 November 2020

Contents

National restrictions and General Aviation
Risk assessments
Social distancing
Face coverings
Aerodromes and training organisations in England
Training and flying instructors
GA maintenance check flights
Communications for aerodromes
Air traffic management
General Aviation flying in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

[Print this page](#)



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National restrictions and General Aviation

National restrictions (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november>) are in place in England to reduce day-to-day contact between people and help stop the spread of coronavirus.

Private pilots should not undertake any sport or leisure flying, in line with the requirement to stay at home without reasonable excuse.

General Aviation (GA) flying for the purposes of work, where it is not reasonably possible to work or provide those services at home, is permitted. Social distancing measures should be in place and observed at all times.

We recommend that flight training for private pilots not continue while the national restrictions are in place.

Flying training organisations providing training for professional pilots may continue to do so, and students undertaking such activity may continue to attend for these purposes. Social distancing measures should be in place and observed at all times.

Engine health and maintenance check flights and flights to maintain currency only, that would otherwise lapse during the planned lockdown period, should only be conducted where there is an urgent requirement to do so, and alternative options are not available.

Such flights, where conducted, must be kept to the minimum duration possible and should land at the same airfield from which they departed.

Whilst these national restrictions are in place, the guidance below is to help businesses that are permitted to continue operating to put measures in place to do that safely.

There's different guidance for Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you>), Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19>) and Wales (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-firebreak-frequently-asked-questions>).

Risk assessments

Public Health England recommends keeping a 2 metre distance from others (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing-after-4-july>). Where this is not possible, you need to:

- carry out a coronavirus risk assessment (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-aviation-guidance-for-operators#risk-ass>)
- take the appropriate actions to reduce the risk of transmission

You need to regularly review your risk assessment to ensure it remains relevant and appropriate. The Health and Safety Executive encourages organisations to identify measures in a priority order (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/index.htm>). Risk assessments should take account of other risks and ensure controls implemented for coronavirus do not increase risks due to other hazards.

The government has published guidance on working safely (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) and how this can be applied in the workplace. You will need to translate this into the specific actions depending on the nature of your business.

Social distancing

The risk of transmission is small at 2 metres and where possible, people taking part in General Aviation activities should maintain 2 metres distance from people outside their household or support bubble.

If you cannot keep a 2 metre distance, reduce the risk by maintaining a 1 metre distance where possible, and taking suitable actions:

- limit the number of people or households that come into contact with each other
- increase the frequency of hand washing and access to hand sanitiser
- use face coverings
- sit / stand side by side or behind other people, rather than facing them
- stay outdoors, rather than indoors, where possible
- touch as few surfaces as possible and increase surface cleaning
- minimise the time spent close to other people, where possible
- keep the activity time involved as short as possible
- making adjustments for those with specific needs or protected characteristics, for example disabled people, older people and pregnant women
- consider groups of people who process information differently or who may not be able to distance from others
- advise people to avoid loud talking, shouting or singing
- dispose of waste safely, including items such as used disposable face coverings

Read more about 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#social-distancing>).

Face coverings

On aircraft

Passengers must wear a face covering (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-air-travel-guidance-for-passengers#face-coverings>) when on board aircraft in England.

This includes people:

- flying as passengers in a balloon
- on an introductory flight
- flying on a cost-shared basis

People sharing piloting or flight crew duties don't have to wear a face covering. However, face coverings are recommended to be worn by all individuals on aircraft, where social distancing is not possible, where it is safe to do so.

In enclosed areas

Passengers must wear a face covering in enclosed areas of airports. This includes visitors to General Aviation premises.

Staff are exempt from the requirement to wear a face covering while they are working. When they are not at work or are off duty (for example, during breaks), staff must wear a face covering inside the premises.

Some people do not have to wear a face covering (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#exemptions-face-coverings>) for reasons of health, age or equality.

How to wear and make a cloth face covering (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>).

A face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used by healthcare and other workers as part of workplace PPE. These should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers.

The risk of infection increases the closer you are to another person with coronavirus and the more time you spend near them. You are very unlikely to be infected from walking past another person. The risk of infection also increases with the number of contacts you have with people outside your household each day.

Please be mindful that the wearing of a face covering may inhibit communication with people who rely on lip reading, facial expressions and clear sound.

Disposing of used face coverings

Use a 'black bag' waste bin or litter bin to dispose of face coverings. You should not put face coverings in a recycling bin or drop them as litter.

Aerodromes and training organisations in England

Aerodrome operators and training organisations are best placed to decide whether opening is in their best interest, either from a commercial or health and safety standpoint.

Steps that organisations should consider taking include:

- encouraging visitors to use hand sanitiser or handwashing facilities as they enter the premises
- calculating the maximum number of visitors that can reasonably follow social distancing guidelines, and limiting the number of appointments at any one time - take into account total floorspace, and any likely pinch points and busy areas
- using online or telephone pre-booking systems, for example when booking flying lessons, and when booking an appointment, asking if customers can attend on their own, where possible
- encouraging customers to arrive at the time of their scheduled appointment or lesson
- informing customers of guidance about visiting the premises prior to, and at the point of arrival, including information on websites, on booking forms and in entrance ways
- adjusting how people move through the premises to reduce congestion, and contact between people, for example, queue management or one-way flow
- ensuring any changes to entrances, exits and queue management take into account reasonable adjustments for those who need them, including disabled clients
- maintaining social distancing in all waiting areas, and communal areas

All venues should ensure that steps are taken to avoid people needing to unduly raise their voices to each other. This includes - but is not limited to - refraining from playing music or broadcasts that may encourage shouting, including if played at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission - particularly from aerosol transmission.

The operation of retailers on site such as cafes should follow government guidance for the sector (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery>).

Toilets

Public toilets, portable toilets and toilets inside premises should be kept open and carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Steps that will usually be needed:

- using signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency and to avoid touching your face, and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into your arm if a tissue is not available
- consider the use of social distancing marking in areas where queues normally form, and the adoption of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out - whilst avoiding the creation of additional bottlenecks
- to enable good hand hygiene consider making hand sanitiser available on entry to toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap and suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand driers) are available
- setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces.
- keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate
- special care should be taken for cleaning of portable toilets and larger toilet blocks
- putting up a visible cleaning schedule can keep it up to date and visible
- providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection

Test and trace

You should assist the NHS Test and Trace service by keeping records of customers, visitors and staff for 21 days (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace>) and providing data to NHS Test and Trace if requested.

Enforcement

Where the enforcing authority, such as the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or your local authority, identifies employers who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks, they are empowered to take a range of actions to improve control of workplace risks. For example, this would cover employers not taking appropriate action to ensure social distancing, where possible.

Failure to complete a risk assessment which takes account of COVID-19, or completing a risk assessment but failing to put in place sufficient measures to manage the risk of COVID-19, could constitute a breach of health and safety law. The actions the enforcing authority can take include the provision of specific advice to employers to support them to achieve the required standard, through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements. Serious breaches and failure to comply with enforcement notices can constitute a criminal offence, with serious fines and even imprisonment for up to two years. There is also a wider system of enforcement, which includes specific obligations and conditions for licensed premises.

Employers are expected to respond to any advice or notices issued by enforcing authorities rapidly and are required to do so within any timescales imposed by the enforcing authorities. The vast majority of employers are responsible and will join with the UK's fight against COVID-19 by working with the government and their sector bodies to protect their workers and the public. However, inspectors are carrying out compliance checks nationwide to ensure that employers are taking the necessary steps.

For further advice see the safer transport guidance for aviation operators (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-aviation-guidance-for-operators>) and guidance on safer workplaces (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

Training and flying instructors

Flying instructors and support staff should be formally informed of the risks and all actions being taken to combat the risks. This is to ensure they:

- understand the specific risks and mitigations
- understand site protocols
- are physically and mentally well enough to engage in a return to training

It will be for individual training organisations to agree with their instructors any conditions for their return.

Instructors deemed clinically extremely vulnerable should continue to follow government advice (<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>).

In most cases it will not be possible to keep a distance of 2 metres apart inside a training aircraft. Measures to manage the risk of transmission will depend on the type and size of the aircraft.

Where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full, training schools and instructors should take the most appropriate actions to reduce the risk of transmission.

Social distancing also applies to all parts of a business where students or instructors may congregate outside of the aircraft. Examples of this include reception areas and classrooms.

Cleaning is vital in all areas of the training venue and aircraft. Training organisations should write and implement a cleaning plan. This should be updated when new information becomes available.

It should ensure that all areas to be accessed by flying instructors, students and support staff are deep cleaned to a minimum standard. This includes regular cleaning for:

- surfaces on board the aircraft
- all other areas accessed by students, instructors and support staff.
- all frequently touched surfaces, for example, door handles, banister rails, buttons and toilet areas

The government has published guidance on working safely (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>) and how this can be applied in the workplace. Each business will need to translate this into the specific actions it needs to take depending on the nature of the business and how it is operated, managed and organised.

Actions you could take include:

- more frequent hand washing and surface cleaning
- wearing a face covering, where it is safe to do so
- disinfection of the aircraft (i.e. frequent touch points including headsets) and outside facilities to a standard which follows government guidance for cleaning in non-healthcare settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>)
- keeping the activity time involved as short as possible
- using screens or barriers (where safe and appropriate to do so) to separate people from each other. These should only be introduced into aircraft under an approved modification
- using side-to-side working (rather than face-to-face) whenever possible
- provision and use of hand sanitiser
- reducing and fixing the number of people each person has contact with - for example, training organisations should consider limiting the number of students per instructor (so each person works with only a few others).
- ensuring only essential people are present in the aircraft for the purposes of safety and effective learning

Organisations should make customers aware of, and encourage compliance with, limits on gatherings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing#seeing-friends-and-family>).

GA maintenance check flights

The CAA has published advice on maintenance flights (<https://www.caa.co.uk/Our-work/Newsroom/COVID-19-guidance-for-commercial-and-recreational-aviation>) - under the heading 'GA maintenance check flights'.

Communications for aerodromes

Aerodrome operators and others involved in GA are encouraged to communicate with local communities. This is to ensure that the easing of restrictions on GA activity is understood not just by the GA community, but also by the general public – particularly those living near to airfields. This is to avoid people becoming concerned by the increase in airfield activity. Pilots should also act responsibly, for example by avoiding noise-sensitive and built-up areas.

Both the CAA and stakeholder organisations within the GA community are valuable sources of information about managing the challenges of flying in the current environment, and members of the community are encouraged to consult both for more detailed advice and guidance where applicable.

Read the CAA's advice and tips for a safe return to flying (<https://publicapps.caa.co.uk/modalapplication.aspx?appid=11&mode=detail&id=9614>).

Air traffic management

Pilots resuming GA activity should be aware that air traffic services are still limited. NATS is trying to reduce non-essential activities, including services to GA. This is to ensure the resilience of the critical air traffic management services, while complying with current guidance by not having more people on site than necessary.

While most GA activity occurs outside of controlled airspace, and therefore does not involve NATS, pilots should therefore be aware of the strain their activity places on other essential services.

Lower airspace radar services are also offered on an 'as and when possible' basis which means they can be turned off if necessary. Similarly, access to Class D could also be simply refused by the relevant air navigation service provider if it has to prioritise other airspace users. The CAA have published further information about short term changes to help Air Traffic Control return to service (<https://www.caa.co.uk/Our-work/Newsroom/COVID-19-guidance-for-commercial-and-recreational-aviation/>).

General Aviation flying in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

This guidance refers to the social distancing guidelines that only apply in England. There may be information in this guidance that is useful for all individuals and businesses taking part in GA activities to consider, but any GA flying in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales must be carried out in a way that ensures that all rules and physical distancing guidance are complied with in those locations.

For information relating to relevant rules and guidance for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales please consult the website of the relevant devolved administration, which will be updated as required.

- information relating to Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-and-what-they-mean-you>)
- information relating to Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-scotlands-route-map>)
- information relating to Wales (<https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-maintain-physical-distancing-workplace>)

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