



Guidelines on Social Interactions during the COVID-19 Pandemic

How is coronavirus spread?

Coronavirus (SARS CoV2) is spread through droplet infection by means of close contact with an infected person or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your nose, eyes or mouth without washing or sanitizing your hands. The potential for becoming infected is a factor of the viral load, which is the number of viral particles that one may have become exposed and the time of exposure i.e. how long one was exposed to the infective particles. The new variant (aka UK variant/ B.1.1.7) has been estimated as being up to 70 times more transmissible than the previously prevalent local strain. ¹The majority of SARS-CoV-2 positive cases in Malta are currently due to the B.1.1.7 (UK) variant.

Who is your household?

Your household comprises those persons who share your living space. They are those who sleep in the same house with you, whom you generally share meals with and share bathrooms with perhaps.

The Groups of Persons in Residential Properties Regulations, 2021 and any of its amendments are in place restricting the gathering in any residential property of groups of persons who respectively between them live in different residences.

Socialising with persons of your household ONLY is the safest option

When mixing with other persons outside of your household, it is important to limit the number of social interactions to as few as possible. This safety of this

¹ [New variant of SARS-CoV-2 in UK causes surge of COVID-19 - The Lancet Respiratory Medicine](#)

'social bubble'² concept depends on the shared responsibility and adherence to social mitigation measures by the members of the social bubble, and public gatherings legislation and its amendments.

What are the factors which need to be adopted to protect one from contracting coronavirus and from unknowingly spreading it to others?

- ✓ Stay home if you are unwell and get tested if you have symptoms of coronavirus
- ✓ Keep away from persons who appear ill
- ✓ Always keep a physical distance from others of at least 2 metres especially when indoors
- ✓ Wear your mask correctly covering your nose, mouth and chin
- ✓ Avoid crowded areas
- ✓ Ensure adequate ventilation in areas where you must meet others
- ✓ Keep your hands clean, carry hand sanitizer when you are outdoors
- ✓ Avoid using methods of shared transport if possible
- ✓ Work from home if your work permits this in agreement with the management of your workplace
- ✓ Take the vaccine when it is offered to you and encourage others to do the same
- ✓ If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 ensure you follow the advice provided by the Public Health Authorities

Guidance and Standards on all these important factors can be found on www.covid19.gov.mt

Hosting or attending a gathering of different households

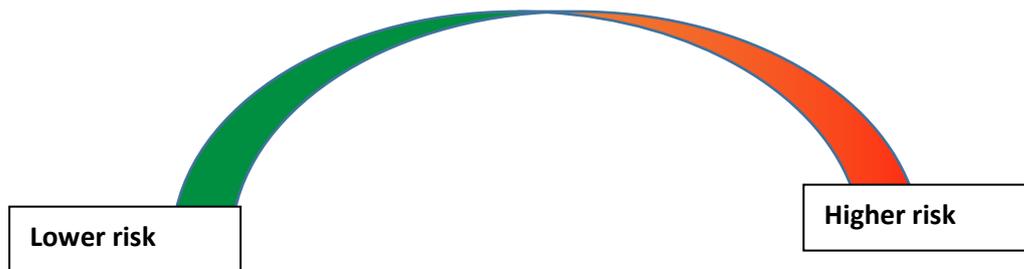
The larger the number of persons and the more persons from different households you meet, the larger your risk that one of these could be a person who is COVID positive without symptoms.

The advice regarding an assessment of risk for any activity that one decides to host or partake in is still relevant and can be based on the following factors below.

² [CARUL Rapid Research Report v 1.8 \(lse.ac.uk\)](https://www.lse.ac.uk/rapid-research-reports/)



Risk is cumulative thus the more households one encounters, the longer one spends at the event, if this involves dining and masks need to be removed, the event becomes one at a higher risk.



Event with household members only	Event with one or more households- risk increases in proportion to the number of households and number of persons invited
Outdoors	Indoors
Mitigation measures-distance and masks kept	Mitigation measures eg. Masks and distancing not upheld
Short duration of event	Longer duration of event
No eating/drinking	A meal is part of event
No medically vulnerable persons are present	Medically vulnerable persons are present

The Groups of Persons in Residential Properties Regulations and any of its amendments are in force and these regulations are to be respected at all times.

This legislation also permits the enforcement of gatherings restrictions within one’s private property and is based upon the evidence that a significant number of infections with COVID-19 occur during social interaction. Persons caught in breach of these provisions are liable to pay a fine for each occasion that these provisions are breached.

Whilst meetings of households are strongly discouraged, when inviting persons from another household into your home, within the limitations of the law:

- Encourage only those who are in good health to attend

- Do not touch or have physical contact with others to greet them, use elbow or shoe tap instead
- Opt for an outdoor event where possible, otherwise ensure adequate ventilation of the premises
- Ensure you have a good physical distance between guests of different households encouraging the use of masks at all times
- Ensure regular sanitizing stations around the premises
- If guests are going to be eating, use long tables and encourage your guests to bring their own food, avoid shared food if you are catering for them
- Masks are only to be removed when eating
- Maintain a list of the persons present for contact tracing purposes for 28 days after the activity
- Do not allow persons to drink excessive amounts of alcohol, keep music to a comfortable level in order to avoid persons having to shout. Both shouting and singing increase the potential aerosolisation of the virus.
- Avoid crowding in restrooms, ensure adequate cleaning and disinfection of the premises before and after the event. If there are surfaces which will be touched frequently, ensure cleaning also takes place periodically during the course of the activity.

You have been invited to a social visit

Apart from ensuring that all relevant regulations in this regard are adhered to, you need to make your own assessment regarding whether you would like to accept an invitation to visit another household. This assessment needs to take into consideration various issues including your assessment of risk based on the type of event as outlined above, your specific vulnerabilities, and the potential of contracting and transmitting the virus to others in your immediate household.

Do not attend any activity and self-isolate if you feel unwell, booking a swab test if you have COVID-19 symptoms.

Family Social Visits generally involving elderly or medically vulnerable persons

COVID-19 has unfortunately isolated those most vulnerable. The strict measures of physical distancing, lack of universal access and ICT literacy has



exacerbated social isolation and mental health illness causing a large burden on the elderly and others with medical comorbidities. Keeping contact with medically vulnerable persons through virtual technologies is the safest option for them, however if one chooses to visit relatives of this kind the following factors may serve to make the encounter less risky.

- ✓ Organising the meeting to take place at the home of the person at risk of complications, preferably in an outdoor area of the house e.g. yard, roof, terrace
- ✓ Limiting the duration of contact
- ✓ Wearing a facemask by everyone, at all times
- ✓ Maintaining an adequate physical distance from your relatives/visitors
- ✓ Limiting the number of visits and number of persons from different households who visit you in a week.

Important points

- ✓ Keep in touch with others using virtual means
- ✓ Risk is cumulative in proportion to the larger the number of households which are mixed and the more frequently you attend such events
- ✓ Do not accept any invitations if you feel unwell - call 111 or book a swab test on www.covidtest.gov.mt.
- ✓ Make an assessment of risk for any social activity you may be invited to, considering risks to yourself and your loved ones
- ✓ Guidance for any mitigation measures mentioned can be found on <http://www.covid19health.gov.mt/>