



Covid-19 UK Lockdown Restrictions and Requirements

MRS Guidance Note

6th January 2021

Introduction

The aim of this Guidance Note is to give context to support the current suite of MRS guidance on undertaking safe face-to-face data collection including new lockdown restrictions announced by the **UK Government on 4th January 2021**.

The current MRS guidance consists of:

- [MRS Guidance: Undertaking Safe Face-to-face Data Collection](#)
- [MRS Guidance: Undertaking Safe Face-to-face Mystery Shopping](#)
- [Guidance on Facilities Used for Face-to-face Data Collection](#)
- [MRS Face-to-Face Data Collection Guidance Interpreting Scotland's Level System](#)

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have also adopted specific measures. Research practitioners are required to give priority to local guidance i.e. where research practice takes place.

The Government guidance for the country in which you are undertaking data collection will apply and research practitioners must follow the relevant Government guidance:

- [England](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Wales](#)

Context

MRS advice is based on our current understanding of UK Government guidance and support on COVID-19 (link: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) which is subject to continuous development. MRS will update and publish accordingly, but it remains the responsibility of research practitioners to keep up to date.

It should be noted the MRS guidance does not replace government advice; it is meant to supplement the official sources with the addition of some research considerations. Remember to continue to check the up-to-date guidance on the relevant Government websites e.g. for England the [UK Government website](#).

Principles of the Guidance

- Research is a business activity, not a social activity.
- Research practitioners have a responsibility to protect participants and the reputation of the profession.
- As a result of the new lockdown restrictions, **research practitioners must only undertake essential face-to-face data collection which cannot be achieved using other methods such as telephone, online or mail.**

- Research practitioners must undertake risk assessments of any proposed essential face-to-face data collection exercise before beginning the activity.
- When face-to-face data collection is undertaken it can only be undertaken in those locations that remain open as a result of Covid-19 restrictions and in locations allowed within the MRS guidance.
- In-home face-to-face data collection continues to be restricted to on the doorstep only.

New Restrictions and Requirements

England

New restrictions for England were introduced on 4th January 2021 and are summarised on the UK Government site: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#detailed-guidance-on-the-national-lockdown>

Northern Ireland

New restrictions were introduced in Northern Ireland on 26th December 2020 and are summarised here: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you>

Scotland

New 'enhanced' Level 4 restrictions were introduced for Scotland on 4th January 2020 and are summarised here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/>

Wales

All of Wales continues to be at Alert Level 4. Details about the Alert levels are available here: <https://gov.wales/covid-19-alert-levels>

Interpretation of Requirements

When requirements use the word "must" these are mandatory requirements and is a principle or practice that applies the MRS Code of Conduct, which Members and Company Partners are obliged to follow.

The requirements which use the phrase "should" describe implementation and denotes a recommended practice.

"May" or "can" refer to the ability to do something, the possibility of something, as well as granting permission.

Codeline

The MRS Standards Team are continuing to review and update the MRS guidance as and when required.

If you have any queries about the MRS Code or any of the [MRS' Covid-19 guidance](#) please contact the MRS Standards Team via the MRS Codeline service (codeline@mrs.org.uk).

Table 1: England Restrictions – extract of those rules relevant to face-to-face data collection – applicable from 5th January 2021 (based upon UK Government guidance dated 4th January 2021)

1. **Stay at home** except when individuals have a 'reasonable excuse'. This restriction will be incorporated into law. A 'reasonable excuse' includes **work where it is unreasonable for individuals to do their job from home (e.g. roles that require in-person attendance) and volunteering or charitable purposes.**
2. **Staying safe outside the home (social distancing):**
 - hands – wash hands regularly and for 20 seconds
 - **face – wear a face covering in indoor settings where social distancing may be difficult, and when individuals come into contact with people they do not normally meet**
 - **space – stay 2 metres apart from other individuals who you do not live with where possible, or 1 metre with extra precautions in place (such as wearing face coverings or increasing ventilation indoors)**
3. Individuals are allowed to meet others in groups only for a permitted purposes. **Permitted purposes includes for work, or providing voluntary or charitable services, where it is unreasonable to do so from home.**
4. Individual should stay local and look to reduce the number of journeys made overall. **A 'reasonable excuse' for travel includes for work where it can not be reasonably undertaken from home.**
5. Individuals should avoid car sharing from outside their household or support bubble. **Where it is essential to car share individuals should follow the [guidance on car sharing](#). If individuals need to use public transport they should follow the [safer travel guidance](#).**
6. Individuals can only travel internationally if they have a legally permitted reason to leave home e.g. work. If individuals need to travel overseas they should look at the rules in place at the destination and check the [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office \(FCDO\) travel advice](#).
7. Individuals can only stay overnight away from their home if they have a 'reasonable excuse' for doing so. A reasonable excuse includes requiring accommodation for work purposes.
8. Colleges, primary (reception onwards) and second schools will remain open only for vulnerable children and children of critical workers. Universities will deliver face-to-face training for limited courses (such as medicine) with the remainder being delivered online.
9. **Businesses and venues which must close:**
 - Non-essential retail, such as clothing and homeware stores, vehicle showrooms (other than for rental), betting shops, tailors, tobacco and vape shops, electronic goods and mobile phone shops, auction houses (except for agricultural purposes) and market stalls selling non-essential goods. These venues can continue to be able to operate click-and-collect (where goods are pre-ordered and collected off the premises) and delivery services
 - Hospitality venues such as cafes, restaurants, pubs, bars and social clubs; with the exception of providing food and drink for takeaway (until 11pm), click-and-collect, drive-through or delivery
 - Accommodation such as hotels, hostels, guest houses and campsites except for specific circumstances, such as where these act as someone's main residence, where they cannot return home, for homeless people, or where it is essential to stay there for work purposes
 - Leisure and sports facilities such as leisure centres and gyms, swimming pools, sports courts, fitness and dance studios, riding arenas, climbing walls and golf courses.

Table 1: England Restrictions – extract of those rules relevant to face-to-face data collection – applicable from 5th January 2021 (based upon UK Government guidance dated 4th January 2021)

- Entertainment venues such as theatres, concert halls, cinemas, museums and galleries, casinos, amusement arcades, bingo halls, bowling alleys, skating rinks, go-karting venues, indoor and soft play centres and areas, circuses, funfairs, zoos and other animal attractions, water parks, theme parks. Indoor attractions at botanical gardens, heritage homes and landmarks must also close, though outdoor grounds of these premises can stay open
- Personal care facilities such as hair, beauty, tanning and nail salons. Tattoo parlours, spas, massage parlours, body and skin piercing services must also close. It is also prohibited to provide these services in other peoples' homes
- Community centres and halls must close except for a limited number of exempt activities as set out below Libraries can also remain open to provide access to IT and digital services - for example for people who do not have it at home - and for click-and-collect

These businesses and places will also be permitted to be open for a small number of exempt activities, including:

- education and training (including for schools to use sports and leisure facilities where that is part of their normal provision)
- childcare purposes and supervised activities for children
- blood donation and food banks
- to provide medical treatment
- for elite sports persons (in indoor and outdoor sports facilities), professional dancers and choreographers (in fitness and dance studios)
- for training and rehearsal without an audience (in theatres and concert halls)
- for the purposes of professional film and TV filming

10. **Other businesses and venues are permitted to stay open, following Covid-19 secure guidelines. The full list of businesses can be found in the [guidance on closing certain businesses and venues in England](#).** This includes those providing essential goods or services, including:

- Essential retail such as food shops, supermarkets, pharmacies, garden centres, hardware stores, building merchants and off-licences
- Market stalls selling essential retail
- Businesses providing repair services
- Petrol Stations, automatic car washes, vehicle repair and MOT services, bicycle shops, and taxi and vehicle hire businesses.
- Banks, building societies, post offices, loan providers and money transfer businesses
- Funeral directors
- Launderettes and dry cleaners
- Medical and dental services
- Vets and retailers of products and food for the upkeep and welfare of animals
- Animal rescue centres, boarding facilities and animal groomers
- Agricultural supplies shops
- Mobility and disability support shops
- Storage and distribution facilities
- Car parks, public toilets and motorway service areas.
- Outdoor playgrounds
- Outdoor parts of botanical gardens and heritage sites for exercise
- Places of worship and crematoriums and burial grounds

11. The majority of public services will continue and individuals will be able to leave home to visit them. These include:

- the NHS and medical services like GPs and dentists

Table 1: England Restrictions – extract of those rules relevant to face-to-face data collection – applicable from 5th January 2021 (based upon UK Government guidance dated 4th January 2021)

- Jobcentre Plus sites
- Courts and probation services
- Civil Registrations Offices
- Passport and Visa Services
- Services provided to victims
- Waste or Recycling Centres
- MOT services

12. Clinically vulnerable¹ individuals should minimise contacts with others and should wash their hands carefully and more frequently than usual and maintain thorough cleaning **of frequently touched areas in home and workspaces. Clinically extremely vulnerable² are advised to work from home and to [follow the guidance set out in the shielding section of the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable guidance.](#)**

¹ Clinically vulnerable people are those who are:

- aged 70 or over (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab each year on medical grounds):
 - chronic (long-term) mild to moderate respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
 - chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
 - chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson’s disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy
 - diabetes
 - problems with the spleen
 - a weakened immune system as the result of certain conditions or medicines they are taking (such as steroid tablets)
 - being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
- pregnant

² People with the following conditions are automatically deemed clinically extremely vulnerable:

- solid organ transplant recipients
- people with specific cancers:
 - people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
 - people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
 - people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
 - people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
 - people having other targeted cancer treatments that can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
 - people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- people with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- people with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell disease)
- people on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection
- problems with your spleen, for example splenectomy (having your spleen removed)
- adults with Down’s syndrome
- adults on dialysis or with chronic kidney disease (stage 5)
- women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired
- other people who have also been classed as clinically extremely vulnerable, based on clinical judgement and an assessment of their needs. GPs and hospital clinicians have been provided with guidance to support these decisions

Table 2: Northern Ireland restrictions – extract of those rules relevant to face-to-face data collection – introduced on 26th December 2020

1. **Individuals** should work from home unless unable to do so. **Those who cannot work from home, for example, workers in food production, construction, manufacturing, logistics or distribution can continue to go to work.**
2. The use of [face coverings](#) is mandatory on public transport, in taxis, private buses, coaches and on aircraft, in train and bus stations and in airports. This includes:
 - boarding any mode of public transport;
 - when on board any mode of public transport; and
 - when present on public transport premises or stops
3. Hospitality venues such as cafes, restaurants, pubs, bars and social clubs must remain closed, with the exception of providing food and drink for takeaway, drive-through or delivery. Businesses providing takeaway services must close at 11.00 pm and off-sales must stop at 8.00 pm. Outdoor areas are not permitted to be used. The provision of food and drink in motorway services, airports and harbour terminals is allowed.
4. **Accommodation can be provided** for those already resident; **for work-related purposes**; for vulnerable people; for those in emergency situations; and people unable to return to their main address.
5. Closure of all retail businesses except for essential retail. Delivery from non-essential retail businesses.
6. Leisure and entertainment venues such as theatres, concert halls, cinemas, amusement arcades, bingo halls, bowling alleys, skating rinks, inflatable parks, go-karting venues, soft play centres, fairgrounds and funfairs, indoor museums, galleries, visitor and other cultural attractions are not permitted to open.

Outdoor visitor attractions are not permitted to open, along with drive-in events. Close contact services, such as hairdressers, beauticians, make-up and nails, tattoo and piercing parlours, tanning shops, massage, electrolysis, well-being and holistic treatments, and driving instructors (except for motorcycles) are not permitted to operate.

A full list of businesses is defined in [the Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(No.2\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland 2020\)](#).

Table 3: Scotland restrictions - extract of those rules relevant to face-to-face data collection – introduced on 5th January 2020

All of Scotland has been placed in Level 4 restrictions, which are detailed in the separate [MRS Face-to-Face Data Collection Guidance Interpreting Scotland's Level System](#). There have been some enhancement to the Level 4 restrictions which are:

- Everyone must now work from home where they can
- changing the 6/2 rule to a 2/2 rule. From tomorrow, a maximum of two people from up to two households will be able to meet outdoors. Children aged 11 and

all schools to continue to use remote learning until the end of January, except in the case of vulnerable children and those of key workers

- stronger guidance on working from home is [reflected in new guidance for people who are shielding](#). Those who are shielding and who cannot work from home are now advised not to work. The Chief Medical Officer is writing to everyone who falls into this category.
- From 8th January a number of other measures will be introducing including closing some additional premises, service providers and retailers. This will include showroom elements of larger retailers and ski centres. From the 8th ending the 1m physical distancing exemption for workplace canteens

Table 4 Wales restrictions - extract of those rules relevant to face-to-face data collection

All of Wales is at [Alert Level 4](#), which are detailed in the [Welsh Government Alert Level Guidance](#).

1. At alert level 4 individuals must:

- Follow social distancing rules with people who are outside of households or who are not in your support bubble
- **There are limited circumstances where gathering with other people away from home outside of households/bubbles is permitted and this includes for work purposes and for voluntary or charitable purposes**
- Wear a face covering (if they are able to) in all indoor public places
- **Stay at home unless 'reasonably necessary' and there is 'no practicable alternative' – this includes for work purposes, or voluntary or charitable purposes**
- Work from home if possible; **individuals who are not able to work from home, but are able to work safely in their workplaces, can do so, provided their workplace remains open**
- Not travel without a reasonable excuse
- Not travel internationally without a reasonable excuse

2. Venues that must be closed at alert level 4:

- Venues for events and conferences
- Theatres and concert halls
- Indoor and outdoor visitor attractions
- Entertainment venue
- Wedding reception or wake
- Sport courts, golf courses
- Leisure and fitness facilities
- Outdoor visitor attractions
- Holiday accommodation (open only if essential only, for example for work or other reasons)
- Hospitality (except for takeaway and delivery)
- Close contact services
- Non-essential retail (click and collect allowed)
- Licenced premises. Takeaway and delivery only between 6am and 10pm
- Libraries and archive services (click and collect only)
- Organised activities limited to public and voluntary services

- Nightclubs and adult entertainment venues

3. Venues that can open at alert level 4:

- Schools, colleges and childcare providers (informal childcare should only be essential only)
- Higher Education Institutions (mix of in-person and remote learning)
- Places of worship
- Community centres - limited opening (for example, for essential public services)
- Crematoriums
- Playgrounds and public parks
- Weddings, in venues that are allowed to be open, and funerals (ceremony limit set by venue)

General

1. **The following MRS requirements directly apply to the new lockdown restrictions. These requirements must be read in conjunction with the appropriate UK or devolved Government guidance and MRS Guidance.**

Undertaking face-to-face data collection

2. Research practitioners **must review all face-to-face data collection projects and determine if face-to-face data collection is essential.**

Note: Essential data collection could include, for example, projects:

- supporting the Covid-19 response e.g. the Covid-19 Infection Study
- assessing adherence and attitudes to the lockdown measures
- assessing essential public services and/or infrastructure, etc.
- addressing regulatory and/or legislative adherence for non-Covid-19 matters

3. **Research practitioners must only undertake essential face-to-face data collection which cannot be achieved using other methods such as telephone, online or mail.**

4. Research practitioners must only undertake essential face-to-face data collection in those locations that are unaffected as a result of Covid-19 closures and restrictions.

Note: the restrictions on outdoor gatherings such as participants' front gardens do not apply for work-based activities such as undertaking essential face-to-face data collection on the doorstep.

5. Research practitioners must not undertake essential face-to-face data collection in those locations that are currently restricted within the MRS guidance e.g. data collection in-home.

6. Research practitioners must undertake a risk assessment of any proposed essential face-to-face data collection exercise before beginning the activity. Research practitioners must follow relevant government guidance such as the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) guidance on Covid-19:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/coronavirus.htm> and the HSE interactive tools: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm>

Note: More information about risk assessments is available in the MRS Research Policy and Standards Webinar - Undertaking Risk Assessments available [here](#).

7. Research practitioners must follow the appropriate [UK Government safe working guidance](#) and the MRS Covid-19 data collection guidance for any essential face-to-face data collection activities that are being undertaken. The relevant MRS guidance documents are:
 - [MRS Guidance: Undertaking Safe Face-to-face Data Collection](#)
 - [MRS Guidance: Undertaking Safe Face-to-face Mystery Shopping](#)
 - [Guidance on Facilities Used for Face-to-face Data Collection](#)

Research Practitioners: General

8. If research practitioners begin to feel unwell, have been in contact with anyone who has been unwell, is feeling unwell or have been contacted by the Track and Trace service they must self-isolate. Individuals may work from home if they are fit to do so and their role enables home working.
9. Research practitioners who are classified as 'clinically extremely vulnerable' individuals had been advised by the UK Government to stay at home. Research practitioners who are clinically extremely vulnerable must not undertake any face-to-face data collection activities.
10. Research practitioners who are clinically extremely vulnerable and fit and wish to work may undertake and/or be selected for other methods of data collection e.g. telephone, online, mail.
11. Research practitioners that are classified as clinically vulnerable individuals should minimise contact with others outside of their household. Research practitioners that are identified as clinically vulnerable, and are fit and wish to work, may be considered for essential face-to-face data collection.
12. Research practitioners must undertake a risk assessment and mitigations before any clinically vulnerable individuals are considered for essential face-to-face data collection. Research practitioners who are clinically vulnerable may undertake and/or be selected for other methods of face-to-face data collection e.g. telephone, online, mail.

During Essential Face-to-face Data Collection

13. When undertaking essential face-to-face data collection research practitioners must [wear a face covering in those areas where this is mandated](#) and in any locations where it is not possible to maintain a social distance of two metres when undertaking essential face-to-face data collection.
14. Research practitioners must continue to follow social distancing rules when undertaking essential face-to-face data collection.
15. Research practitioners must check whether additional restrictions apply in their area, particularly if working close to any of the four nations' borders.
16. Research practitioners must follow any other local lockdown restrictions which could be imposed in specific areas and/or locations.
17. In circumstances where social distancing may not be possible such as using mystery shopping techniques, research practitioners must endeavour to ensure there is

enough space to undertake their essential face-to-face data collection activities safely, where possible adhering to social distancing requirements and not causing obstruction to other individuals, the possibility of contact and/or not meeting social distancing requirements with other individuals in the vicinity of any given project.

18. Research practitioners should act with consideration with participants and be aware of heightened awareness linked with the new restrictions when approaching participants.
19. Research practitioners should take extra care with their working safely and infection hygiene arrangements including themselves and the materials and tools they use.

Travel To and From Essential Face-to-face Data Collection

20. Research practitioners must consider the amount of travel required to undertake essential face-to-face data collection and introduce approaches which minimise the amount of travel required e.g. localise data collection to specific areas.
21. Research practitioners when travelling for essential face-to-face data collection projects, must plan ahead or avoid busy public transport times and routes.
22. Research practitioners must follow any lockdown travel restrictions which apply to each of the UK's four nations if essential face-to-face data collection requires travel to any of these areas e.g. undertaking essential face-to-face data collection close to the borders.
23. Research practitioners should not travel beyond their local area for essential face-to-face data collection purposes unless absolutely necessary for the purposes of the project.

Overnight Stays

24. Research practitioners should not stay overnight anywhere other than their primary residences except for essential business purposes. Research practitioners should make appropriate plans to minimise such overnight stays.

Vehicle Sharing

25. Research practitioners must reduce, where possible, the amount of vehicle sharing they undertake when travelling to and from face-to-face data collection projects.
26. Research practitioners who share vehicles with colleagues (e.g. car share) to travel for face-to-face data collection must follow the appropriate Government guidance on vehicle sharing e.g. the UK Government's [guidance on car sharing](#) or the [Scottish Government's advice on car and vehicle sharing](#).