

SOME GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEERS WHEN VOLUNTEERING FOR A COVID-19 OPPORTUNITY

If you are considering volunteering your time to support a volunteering opportunity in relation to COVID-19, you need to be mindful that safeguarding people from abuse, harm and infection is paramount – and that includes you! The organisation you are volunteering with should be communicating with you about safe methods and systems for doing things that protect everyone.

July 2021 Update: In Northern Ireland we have begun to move to reduced restrictions, meaning there is an opportunity to re-introduce a number of different volunteer roles. We are therefore asking volunteer involving organisations to consider the [regulations and guidance](#) very carefully to see how they might apply to their own volunteer roles.

The message from Government is still that we should make safer choices and follow public health advice. Working from home guidance remains in place. Notably, the guidelines continue to state that you can leave home to provide voluntary or charitable services, if you cannot reasonably do so from home.

Organisations will need to use a risk assessment process to support their decision making and to manage the risk. It is also essential that organisations engage with volunteers to ensure they feel confident to take part. This should be an opportunity to provide them with all relevant information on social distancing, face coverings, hand hygiene, etc. You should maintain social distancing, as well as good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Volunteers who are [vulnerable](#), including aged over 70, should be especially careful. They should follow social distancing and minimise contact with others. While they can volunteer outside of the home, they should first consider volunteering from home.

Here are some things to think about:

- Your safety is your number one priority. Do not put yourself (or others) at risk- follow all the guidelines for infection control around hand hygiene, social distancing, face coverings, etc. See <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public>
- Make sure that you are aware of all current government Covid-19 restrictions and how they might apply to the organisation and the role they are asking you to carry out. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19> Volunteering can be carried out within government's Covid-19 restrictions, assuming all safety measures are in place. For example, going into a person's house for the provision of care or assistance to a vulnerable person, as part of an agreed volunteer role, is permitted.
- Be clear about what activities you will be doing and the expectations and boundaries around the role.
- Your willingness to help is great but be clear about what is realistic for you to do under difficult circumstances, as your wellbeing is important. Be careful that you do not overstretch yourself as COVID-19 is continuing for a long time.

[A guide to protecting your wellbeing](#) as a volunteer during COVID-19 has been developed by Volunteer Ireland. There are also some useful training resources including training courses which can be found [here](#). Finally, the Public Health Agency has also produced a guide ([Useful Guide to Mental and Emotional Wellbeing Resources](#)).

- Make sure you have clear contact details of the main contact person for this opportunity. This means you know who is coordinating the activity and who to contact if you have any questions or concerns.
- The organisation that is coordinating your activity may have to carry out certain checks before you start volunteering. Please be patient as this is for the safety of everyone including yourself.
- Do not volunteer if you yourself are feeling unwell or are sick. You must inform the person in charge immediately.
- You will need to wear protective clothing especially gloves, carry water, and handwash when you are volunteering. Check with the organisation that you are volunteering for to see what is expected and what can be made available for you. See [here](#) for further information on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- The organisation may provide volunteers who need to travel with proof that they are carrying out legitimate activities on their behalf, e.g. ID cards with volunteer's name, their organisation and organisation's contact details; official letter from the organisation; email or WhatsApp/text message from the charity on the volunteer's phone; branded t-shirts, bibs and car stickers. See [Sample Letter for Volunteers](#) (Word download).
- Avoid situations that involve gathering personal details of vulnerable people. For more information see <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/news-and-events/blog-community-groupsand-covid-19/>
- Do not enter the homes of vulnerable people unless this is part of your role and the activity and safety measures have been agreed with the organisation in advance.
- Think creatively about the role, e.g. how to get shopping lists over the phone, leave shopping at the door, only buying essentials so as they can be carried by the person from their doorstep into the house.
- Avoid handling and exchanging money and under no circumstances accept credit/debit cards, PIN numbers or details of people you are supporting. The organisation will have set up a system for this so make sure you are aware of it. For example, if doing shopping, methods other than cash exchange are easier to trace and less vulnerable to abuse or infection, e.g. taking pictures of receipts and sharing with the organisation may work for some. See [Guidance on Money Issues](#).
- Keep your distance at all times - maintain the 2-metre distance rule.

- Do not share any information that you gain about vulnerable people in your community – confidentiality is of paramount importance.
- Report any concerns, incidents or disclosures to the organisation (the organisation must give you clear procedures for this). For more information, see our [Keeping Children & Adults Safe Factsheet](#) and access our free online safeguarding courses [here](#).
- Show ID with photograph and clearly presented name if interacting with vulnerable people.
- Be prepared to refer on any issues that you cannot deal with. You must report concerns to the relevant authorities such as the police or the local Trust.
- Try to minimise your activity, e.g. doing shopping for others when you are doing your own and restrict to only essential items.
- If making or receiving telephone calls from people who are vulnerable, see examples of [Support and Training](#) here.
- If preparing food, follow good [Food Safety Guidelines](#).
- If volunteers are called upon to support someone with sight loss, the following information may be helpful <https://e-activist.com/page/59879/action/1>.
- Share good news stories when you can through the #HelpEachOther hashtag to highlight the amazing volunteering contribution that is taking place right across Northern Ireland in the fight against COVID-19. These stories can inspire others to get involved and raise everyone's spirit during this uncertain time.

For general government guidance, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-how-to-help-safely--2/coronavirushow-to-help-safely>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/volunteering-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>

Disclaimer

Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure information in this publication is accurate. However, it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith without accepting liability. If relevant, we therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking any action on the matters covered herein.

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