

INFORMAL VOLUNTEERING IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 – KEEPING YOURSELF AND OTHERS SAFE

July 2022 Update: In Northern Ireland we currently have reduced restrictions, meaning there is an opportunity to deploy most volunteer roles. We are still asking volunteer involving organisations to consider the regulations and guidance carefully to see how they could apply to their own volunteer roles.

The message is still that we should make safer choices and follow public health advice. Working from home guidance is in place. Notably, the guidelines continue to state that you can leave home to provide voluntary or charitable services. 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 continue to 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 where possible. While they can volunteer outside of the home, they should first consider volunteering from home.

Wanting to help in a crisis is a natural reaction but here are some things to think about if you are doing this yourself and not part of an established group:

- Whatever you choose to do to help others, make sure that you are aware of all current Government Covid-19 restrictions and how they might apply to you. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>
- 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>
- Your willingness to help is great, but be clear about what is realistic for you to do under difficult circumstances.
- While you may just want to get out there and get volunteering, you may want to contact other already established groups operating in your area and volunteer through them, as it makes overall coordination easier.
- Do not help others if you yourself are feeling unwell or are sick. See <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/covid-19-information-public>
- Your wellbeing is important, be careful that you do not overstretch yourself, as this situation could go on for some time. There are 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](#)).
- You may need to access and wear protective clothing like gloves, carry water and handwash, especially if you are handling shopping and money.
- Be aware that not everyone will want help and may be wary of people they do not know.
- Show ID with photograph and clearly presented name if interacting with vulnerable people.
- Try to minimise your activity, e.g. doing shopping for others when you are doing your own and restrict to only essential items.
- Be prepared to refer on any issues that you cannot deal with. Report concerns to the relevant authorities such as the police or the local Trust.
- Think carefully about the roles you carry out. Safeguarding people from abuse, harm and infection is paramount so you need to think about safe methods and systems that protect everyone. For example:
 - Avoid situations that involve gathering personal details of people who are vulnerable.
 - Avoid entering people's homes – stay 2 metres away, leaving items on the doorstep.
 - Think creatively about how to, for example, 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 money where possible. 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 a family member or nominated carer may work for some. See here for some [Guidance on money issues](#).
 - If preparing food, follow good [Food Safety Guidelines](#).

If volunteers are called upon to support someone with sight loss, the following information from Guide Dogs may be helpful <https://e-activist.com/page/59879/action/1>.

If you are considering setting up an online fundraising appeal, please be mindful of the Fundraising Regulations- See <https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/more-fromus/resources/10-steps-setting-fundraising-appeal>

Guidance for Groups on Data Protection: <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/news-and-events/blog-community-groups-and-covid-19/>

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

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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