



## Public Health

# COVID-19 Social distancing recommendations

This briefing provides a summary of the key barriers and enablers of social distancing in public places within Hertfordshire, along with recommendations for interventions that might tackle these. This has been developed using the Behaviour Change Wheel framework and the COM-B model of behaviour change (Michie et al. 2011), synthesising insights drawn from scientific research, expert recommendations and theory.

### THE OUTCOME AND TARGET BEHAVIOURS

Social distancing is required to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. Effective prevention of transmission is required to:

- Protect the health of individuals.
- Conserve public resources (e.g. limit demand on NHS services).
- Prevent the need for further episodes of lockdown.

Transmission of COVID-19 can be effectively prevented if people reliably adhere to government guidance including the following behaviours:

- Maintain social distancing by remaining 2m apart from each other in public places.
- Wear a face covering if unable to maintain a distance of 2m apart in enclosed spaces.
- Maintain good hand and respiratory hygiene.

This guidance relates to the behaviour of individuals in public spaces such as the high streets and public parks. It does not apply to behaviour inside public buildings (e.g. libraries) or commercial properties (e.g. shops). A separate briefing and toolkit has been developed by the Behaviour Change Unit to help employers implement social distancing in their businesses<sup>1</sup>.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

People are more likely to perform social distancing behaviours if:

- **They have the knowledge and skills required to perform the behaviour** (capability influences). Specifically:
  - They know they are required to stay 2m away from each other.
  - They understand what 2m looks like in practice.
  - If they can remember to keep 2m away from people, even in busy or new situations.

### How can this be achieved?

Conduct an environmental analysis to establish if there is sufficient space to allow people to maintain a distance of 2m. Depending on the outcomes, you can consider the following measures:

- Restricting access to the space,
- Using 'one-way' systems and/or signage with simple messages such as 'keep left',
- Working with local service providers to consider altering business practices to reduce bottlenecks.

- **The physical and social environment needs to provide support for the behaviour** (opportunity influences). Specifically:
  - Maintaining a physical distance of 2m apart does not cost them unnecessary time (e.g. unwanted delays due to protracted queuing).
  - They think that most people in their community believe that maintaining a distance of 2m is the right thing to do.
  - They see other people complying.

### How can this be achieved?

Conduct an environmental analysis to establish if there is sufficient space to allow people to maintain a distance of 2m. Depending on the outcomes, you can consider the following measures:

- Restricting access to the space.
- Using 'one-way' systems and/or signage with simple messages such as 'keep left'.
- Working with local service providers to consider altering business practices to reduce bottlenecks.

- **The behaviour is consistent with the following five motivational influences:** a person's identity, values, their beliefs about their ability to perform the behaviour and its consequences, and the emotional and habitual processes that underpin it.

### How can this be achieved?

Use signs, posters and social media messaging that draws attention to the positive impact of maintaining 2m from others in the environment. Communicate that the behaviour will:

- Reduce their risk of being exposed to COVID-19.
- Enable people to protect themselves and the people they care about.
- Prevent negative consequences, (e.g.) the need for another period of lockdown.

Draw people's attention to the community benefits of maintaining 2m distance and will lead to the generation of positive emotions about doing the behaviour.

For each of the three influences on behaviour (capability, opportunity and motivation), recommendations for interventions that can be used to support people to comply with social distancing guidance are detailed below.

## CAPABILITY INFLUENCES

People are more likely to perform social distancing behaviours if:

- **They have the knowledge and skills required to perform the behaviour** (capability influences). Specifically:
  - They know that they are required to stay 2m away from each other.
  - They understand what 2m looks like and can apply it to different situations.
  - They are able to remember to keep 2m away from people, even in busy or new situations.

**Interventions that can be used to support people with the capability to do the behaviour include the following:**

- **C1** - Signs, posters or social media posts that remind people that they are required to stay 2m away from each other in open spaces.
- **C2** - Markers in the environment that show people what 2m distance looks like.

For example:

- **C2.1** - Footprint nudge; footprints are painted on the ground at intervals of 2m apart to illustrate the distance that people should maintain from each other.
- **C2.2** - Circle zones; footprints are painted on the ground and surrounded by a painted circle that illustrates what a 2m distance would look like for the person standing on the footprint.
- **C3** - Interventions like these need to be placed at regular intervals within the environment in question in order to be effective. For example, it is unlikely to be enough to place such signage or markers at the entry to a park or high street and expect people to remember that as they continue their journey. People will need regular reminders and cues to check that they are maintaining the 2m distance in the environment.

## OPPORTUNITY INFLUENCES

People are more likely to perform social distancing behaviours if:

- **The physical and social environment around them provide support for the behaviour** (opportunity influences). Specifically:
  - Maintaining a physical distance of 2m apart does not cost them unnecessary time (the imposition of physical distancing measures might cause unwanted delays – e.g. people spend so long queuing to buy their lunch that they do not have time to eat it).
  - They think that most people in their community believe that maintaining a distance of 2m is the right thing to do.
  - They see more examples of other people complying with social distancing guidance than not and are aware that most people in their community are compliant.

## Interventions to support opportunity to perform social distancing behaviours include the following:

- **01-** For each space where you are going to intervene to encourage socially distant behaviour, conduct an environmental analysis to identify the following:
  - Is there sufficient space in the environment to allow people to maintain a distance of 2m?
  - Are there places in the environment in which it will not be possible to maintain a distance of 2m?
  - Where are the spaces where there is a high risk of people failing to maintain a distance of 2m even when they are able to do so (e.g. entrances in and out of shops, spaces where things like benches may cause people to alter their path)?

This could be achieved by observing how people currently use the space, or consulting stakeholders or people who regularly used the space prior to the COVID-19 crisis.

Using the results of the environmental analysis consider the following interventions:

For environments where 2m is possible, but not if there is overcrowding:

- **01.1** - Consider methods to restrict access to the space so that people are able to maintain the required distance from each other (e.g. timed slots to access the space, setting a limit on the numbers of people who can access the space at any one time, along with one-in-one-out measures using marshalling).

For spaces where there is not sufficient space to maintain 2m, or where physical aspects of the environment increase risk of not being able to maintain 2m distancing:

- **01.2** - Restrict access to these spaces (e.g. using cordons or other physical methods to prevent people from using them).
- **01.3** - Consider using 'one-way' systems and/or signage with simple messages such as 'keep left', where the issue is people walking towards each other in a restricted area. The 'keep left' can help establish new habits for using particular spaces. It can also capitalise on existing habits, for example how people use roads.
- **01.4** - If there is no ability to physically restrict people from using the space, use signs or other cues to remind people to take other precautions to protect themselves (e.g. wearing a face covering in enclosed spaces or waiting until they can pass through the space safely).

For environments where encouraging physical distancing may create unwanted time demands on residents (e.g. increased times for access to services):

- **01.5** - Work with local service providers to consider altering business practices to reduce bottlenecks.

- **02** - Consider using messages that communicate that maintaining 2m is viewed positively by the majority of people in Hertfordshire. Messaging could be along the lines of: “thank you for helping to protect your community by keeping 2m apart”.
- **03** - Different communities may have different beliefs and expectations. Consider how you could tailor your messages for different cultures. This should include using appropriate and credible models drawn from the community to demonstrate performance of the behaviour (the messenger can be crucial concerning the extent to which people will believe the message they receive and the likelihood they will act on it).

## MOTIVATIONAL INFLUENCES

People are more likely to perform social distancing behaviour if:

- **The behaviour is consistent with a person’s identity, values, their beliefs about their ability to perform the behaviour and its consequences, and the emotional and habitual processes that underpin it (motivational influences).** Specifically:
  - They believe that they are personally at risk of contracting the virus and the impact of being infected will be serious for themselves or other people.
  - They believe that maintaining a distance of 2m will:
    - o Reduce their risk of being exposed to COVID-19.
    - o Protect themselves and the people they care about.
    - o Prevent other negative consequences, such as the need for another period of lockdown.
  - They believe that it is possible for them to maintain a 2m distance in that situation.
  - The overall emotional state when performing the behaviour is positive,(i.e. the emotion generated by knowing that maintaining 2m apart protects yourself and others), and these perceived positives outweigh the negatives (e.g. the irritation at things taking longer because of the need to maintain the 2m distance).
  - There are frequent prompts to remind them to maintain a 2m distance.
  - They are encouraged to develop new routines and habits about how to behave in the environment that will become the ‘new normal’ in how they use that space.

Interventions to support motivation to perform social distancing behaviours include the following:

- **M1** - Use signs, posters and social media messaging that draws attention to the positive impact of maintaining 2m from others in the environment, particularly that the behaviour will:
  - Reduce their risk of being exposed to COVID-19.
  - Protect themselves and the people they care about.
  - Prevent other negative consequences, such as the need for another period of lockdown.

- **M2** - Make it as easy as possible for people to maintain a 2m distance by methods which reduce overcrowding, remind people to keep 2m apart, and help them to know what 2m looks like (as stated in recommendation points C1 and C2 in the capability influences section).
- **M3** - Use signs, posters and social media messaging that reinforces the need to maintain 2m distancing in all situations to prevent infection.
- **M4** - Use messaging in signs, posters and social media that draw people's attention to the personal and community benefits of maintaining a 2m distance and will lead to the generation of positive emotions about doing the behaviour. For example, messaging that thanks peoples for their efforts and praises them for performing the behaviour and for their patience (e.g. or "thank you for social distancing and helping to keep the high street open"). You can also add images and icons to achieve this (e.g. emoji's can be used to help generate positive emotions towards the messaging).

### Authors

Produced by Hertfordshire County Council Behaviour Change Unit: Ludovico Nocco (Behavioural Science Specialist, document lead), Wayne Bateman (Behavioural Science Specialist) and Dr. Michelle Constable (Head of HCC Behaviour Change Unit), with UCL Centre for Behaviour Change Deputy Director Dr. Paul Chadwick.

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