



Department for
Communities

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GUIDANCE FOR URBAN CENTRES AND GREEN SPACES





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Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 How to use this guidance.....	4
1.2 What we mean by 'urban centres' and 'green spaces'.....	5
2. Principles for safer urban centres and green spaces.....	6
2.1 Social distancing.....	6
2.2 Protecting people who are at higher risk.....	6
2.3 Face coverings.....	6
2.4 Cleaning.....	7
2.5 Hygiene.....	7
3. Issues for Public Spaces.....	9
Urban Centres	
4. Management of urban centres.....	10
4.1 Issues in urban centres.....	10
4.2 Potential interventions that could support social distancing.....	11
Green Spaces	
5. Management of green spaces.....	13
5.1 Issues around green spaces.....	13
5.2 Potential interventions that could support social distancing.....	14
6. Regulatory and Communication considerations.....	16
6.1 Regulatory considerations.....	16
6.2 Communication considerations.....	16
Appendix - Where to obtain further information.....	17

1. Introduction

This guidance focuses on the design principles for safer urban centres and green spaces. **The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2021** impose temporary statutory restrictions, including on the use of certain premises and public outdoor spaces, and are under constant review by the Department of Health.

This guidance contains information on assessing possible issues and provides some examples of interventions that may be undertaken by the owners and operators of public spaces to keep people safer as and when the restrictions are relaxed and these places become busier.

This guidance applies in Northern Ireland only and does not impose any legal obligations. It is mainly intended for owners and operators of public places including but not limited to:

- Local councils and town/city centre managers
- Landowners
- Commercial landlords responsible for public places
- Management companies

It is intended to enable them to plan for the temporary adaptations and interventions that will be needed as the restrictions on

staying at home are gradually reduced and we move through the stages of the **NI Executive's Moving Forward: Pathway out of Restrictions**. This guidance has been prepared on behalf of the NI Executive. This guidance should be considered alongside Public Health and Safety requirements.

Whilst this guidance is mainly intended for owners and operators of public places, it remains the responsibility of the individual user of such places to act on all guidance to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission (some examples are provided in the Appendix to this guidance).

We expect the guidance will be updated over time - this version is up to date as of 19 October 2021.

1.1 How to use this guidance

This document sets out guidance for urban centres and green spaces that the NI Executive advises should be assessed and adapted as necessary to operate safely in line with social distancing measures and the restrictions in place.

Each owner/operator is advised to translate the principles and examples in this guidance into the specific actions they need to take, alongside other guidance produced by the NI Executive.

1.2 What we mean by 'urban centres' and 'green spaces'

The focus of this document is those urban centres and green spaces likely to experience high footfall, particularly as the restrictions on staying at home are gradually eased through the stages of the NI Executive's Moving Forward: Pathway out of Restrictions.

Urban centres - in Northern Ireland normally those settlements with

populations over 5,000 inhabitants are considered urban but in this guidance can be used in all settlements - with a focus on publicly accessible areas such as high or main streets, transport hubs and shopping areas.

Green spaces - are publicly accessible open spaces focussed in, but not limited to, urban and suburban environments including parks, burial grounds and cemeteries.

2. Principles for safer urban centres and green spaces

Owners and operators of public places should take into account the latest advice on social distancing from the Public Health Agency when identifying key issues in urban centres and green spaces.

Guidance on social distancing, protecting people who are at higher risk, face coverings, cleaning and hygiene are covered below:

2.1 Social distancing

Guidance on social distancing is available at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) regulations and guidance: what they mean for you | nidirect](#).

Guidance on 'staying safe outside your home', which includes guidance on 'Keeping your distance from people outside your household' and 'Guidance on social distancing for blind and partially sighted people' is available at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): staying safe outside your home | nidirect](#)

2.2 Protecting people who are at higher risk

Guidance for '**clinically extremely vulnerable**' and '**vulnerable**' people is available at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for 'clinically extremely vulnerable' and 'vulnerable' people | nidirect](#)

If you are '**clinically extremely vulnerable**' or '**vulnerable**' it is important to continue to be particularly careful in following the advice on limiting household contacts, keeping social distance, hand washing and wearing a face covering.

2.3 Face coverings

"Face covering" means a covering of any type which covers a person's nose and mouth.

The use of face coverings is now required in all indoor settings accessible to the public across Northern Ireland. This includes shops, shopping centres, public, private and school transport services, taxis, airplanes, public transport stations and airports, banks, churches, cinemas, and some government offices.

Requirements to wear a face covering are outlined in [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Wearing of Face Coverings\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2020](#) (as amended).

Some circumstances make it difficult for some people to wear face coverings. In these circumstances people may have a 'reasonable excuse' not to wear a face covering. Examples of 'reasonable

excuse' are outlined in the Regulations and included in the guidance on face coverings detailed below.

Individuals should be mindful that the wearing of a face covering may inhibit communication with people who rely on lip reading, facial expressions and clear sound.

In green spaces, individuals should consider using face coverings in more frequently used areas such as car parks.

Relevant guidance on face coverings and the reason for their use, inclusive of information as to how to make and how to wear a face covering, is available at [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): face coverings | nidirect](#) and further links are included in the Appendix to this guidance.

2.4 Cleaning

Owners and operators are advised to implement cleaning protocols to limit coronavirus transmission in public places. It is advised that touch points or places which are likely to be used frequently (e.g. entry barriers, handrails, gates and card terminals) should be particular areas of focus for increased cleaning and should be regularly sanitised.

Increased cleaning may not be appropriate in some green spaces where the risk presented by touching rails is low.

Individuals must practice good hygiene to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission whatever the environment.

2.5 Hygiene

To help everyone maintain good hygiene, consideration should be given to:

- Using simple, clear and accessible images and messaging to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency and to avoid touching your face, and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into your arm if a tissue is not available; with consideration for groups whose first language may not be English or where alternative formats may be required (examples of information posters are provided at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information posters | nidirect](#))
- Provision of handwashing facilities and, where not readily available or accessible, sufficient provision of automated hand sanitising dispensers
- Where possible, providing either paper towels or electrical hand dryers in handwashing facilities
- Setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage, i.e. enhanced cleaning for facilities that are heavily used. Use normal cleaning products, paying particular attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces

- Use of social distancing marking in areas where queues normally form, and the adoption of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out (whilst avoiding the creation of bottlenecks)
- Keeping the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate
- Taking special care for cleaning of portable toilets and larger toilet blocks
- Putting up a visible cleaning schedule and keeping it up to date

- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection

In addition, Public Health Guidance on COVID-19 can be found on the Public Health Agency website below: [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](https://www.hscni.net/covid-19)

Local councils, owners and operators may also wish to consider increasing public toilet facilities to ensure there is suitable provision by, for example, providing portable toilets.

3. Issues for Public Spaces

It will be important to identify the key design issues and potential temporary interventions related to social distancing in urban centres and green spaces. This will be particularly important in places with the densest development and where high levels of footfall are expected. The following steps could be applied:

- 1. Identify your public spaces.** These could be transport hubs, high streets, shopping centres, areas for employment and commercial uses and parks; typically characterised by high footfall or constrained areas for transport modes, pedestrian, cycle and vehicular
- 2. Consider *user groups*;** who will be using the space and the level of activity/ footfall expected
- 3. Assess the key social distancing *issues, potential conflicts and risks***
- 4. Consider the interventions that can be made to *address* these issues, conflicts and risks**
- 5. Consider the *statutory and legal implications*,** and liaise with statutory bodies
- 6. Consider the *implementation of temporary*** physical interventions, timings and procurement implications that will be suitable in the public realm
- 7. Consider the *management of spaces*** and interventions including;
 - Guiding movement through the spaces
 - The potential need for any enforcement measures such as at entrance areas to supervise and assist
- 8. Consider the *maintenance issues*** such as cleaning and repairing
- 9. *Monitor*** use, management and maintenance and effectiveness of such measures
- 10. *Review*** and consider the phasing in and out of such measures.

Urban Centres

4. Management of urban centres

In managing urban centre ‘hotspots’ owners and operators should take account of any issues identified in their assessments and consider applying temporary interventions to ensure social distancing as it is these areas, which provide retail services, which pose increased risk when restrictions are eased.

It is recognised that despite common issues our urban centres have their own unique identities and that interventions may have to be tailored or adjusted to fit.

To ensure social distancing in urban centres, owners and operators are advised to consider:

- How their pedestrian space is managed?
- How people are moved around within the centres?
- What queuing requirements are necessary?
- The management of traffic.

Owners and operators for these areas may wish to consider the use of ambassadors/ marshals/ stewards or their equivalents. These staff can provide in-person advice and support in areas of high footfall to aid compliance with COVID-19 public health measures, including social distancing requirements.

4.1 Issues in urban centres

Issues for maintaining social distancing in urban centres may include:

- High footfall and areas of dense population, particularly at peak times
- Multiple queues due to restricted entry and exit points into different areas or shops
- Pedestrian movement flows varying as different people move to different shops and facilities
- Constraints on pedestrian movement from unnecessary obstacles such as planters, transport stops, landscape features and bins
- Need to provide space for regular, safe, formal and informal road crossing points
- Need to accommodate people entering and exiting spaces from different types of transport e.g. cars, bikes, foot, bus and train in the same area
- Higher levels of traffic congestion and increased need for vehicle access
- Multiple landowners and stakeholders operating in

- the same areas requiring a coordinated approach
- Ability to wash hands or hand sanitation
- The impacts of inclement weather, which may change pedestrian behaviour, for example, greater likelihood of congregation in covered areas and a potential change in behaviour when being asked to queue in uncovered outdoor spaces and follow one-way systems
- People with disabilities and other groups who may have additional needs to be kept under consideration

4.2 Potential interventions that could support social distancing

In terms of managing pedestrian space you should consider the following:

- Footway widening to accommodate distancing between pedestrians, including the use of temporary barriers in the carriageway; changes to parking bays, loading bays and cycle lanes
- Reducing unnecessary obstacles, for example planters, and add markings/tape on seating to maintain social distancing
- Security considerations
- The impacts of measures on people with disabilities and other groups needs to be kept under consideration and may call for an objective approach
- Signage and communications to remind pedestrians of

distance requirements

- If appropriate, implementing initiatives which could serve as “pull factors” towards safe and large outdoor spaces, such as outdoor art displays or other focal points.
- Signage and communications to highlight the busiest times to encourage pedestrians to visit busier areas at off-peak times.

In terms of managing pedestrian movement you should consider the following:

- One-way movement of pedestrians to maintain social distancing
- Signage to encourage pedestrians to wait and allow others to pass at entry ways or along footpaths
- The provision of separate entry and exit routes for pedestrian access with clear signs
- How to make best use of access to entry and exit routes to minimise queues
- The movement of bus stops/shelters to areas which can accommodate queuing in line with social distancing requirements

In terms of managing queuing you should consider the following:

- Defined areas to indicate where pedestrians should stand when queuing using spray markings or temporary barriers

- The management of multiple queues for different businesses through clear signage and the use of ambassadors/marshals/stewards or their equivalent. These staff can provide in-person advice and support to aid compliance with Covid-19 public health measures, including social distancing requirements
- “Do not join the queue” signs provided at popular destinations, when capacity reached
- Where possible and safe to do so, how queues can be positioned in more sheltered areas, such as under awnings to protect those queuing from inclement weather
- Ensuring any changes to entries, exits and queue management take into account reasonable adjustments for those who need them, including people with disabilities

In terms of traffic management, you should consider the following:

- How traffic lanes could be closed, made one way or completely pedestrianised
- How delivery access and timing and

essential access for street works and maintenance should be scheduled

- Reducing car parking layout and spacing even if this means reducing capacity
- Suspending on-street parking to facilitate other measures
- Additional parking or facilities such as bike racks, to reduce use of public transport
- Signage to inform pedestrians and road users of changes to road layouts
- Any security considerations, and the impact of measures on people with disabilities and other groups, need to be kept under consideration. (This includes access for blue badge holders and may call for a balanced approach.)

Green Spaces

5. Management of green spaces

In managing green spaces owners and operators should take account of any issues identified in their assessments and consider applying temporary interventions to ensure social distancing in these areas.

Green spaces will typically include:

- Public parks
- Recreation grounds
- Publicly accessible playing fields
- Public open spaces associated with housing developments
- Public burial grounds

It is recognised that despite common issues our green spaces have their own unique identities and that interventions may have to be tailored or adjusted to fit.

As with urban centres, to ensure social distancing in green spaces, owners and operators are advised to consider:

- How their pedestrian space is managed?
- How people are moved around within the spaces?
- What queuing requirements are necessary?
- The management of traffic

Owners and operators for these areas may wish to consider the use of ambassadors/ marshals/ stewards or their equivalents. These staff can provide in-person advice and support in areas of high footfall to aid compliance with COVID-19 public health measures, including social distancing requirements.

5.1 Issues around green spaces

Issues for maintaining social distancing around green spaces may include:

- High levels of footfall particularly in warmer weather, during the day and in dense urban centres
- Addressing different needs of multiple user groups including pedestrians, cyclists, young people, families, older people and those with disabilities
- Restricted entry and exit points limiting the flow of people and potentially creating queues
- Need to accommodate different users moving in different patterns across these spaces
- Visitor car parking, loading and maintenance access
- Ability to wash hands or hand sanitation

- The impacts of inclement weather, which may change public behaviour, for example, greater likelihood of congregation in covered areas and a potential change in behaviour when being asked to queue in uncovered outdoor spaces and follow one-way systems
- Increased footfall around park facilities such as playgrounds

5.2 Potential interventions that could support social distancing

In terms of managing pedestrian space you should consider the following:

- Footway widening to accommodate distancing between pedestrians, including through use of temporary barriers, changes to parking bays and cycle lanes
- Reducing unnecessary obstacles, for example planters and the addition of markings/tape on seating to maintain social distancing
- The placement of signage and communications to remind pedestrians of distance requirements. This could be through spray markings and signing at entrances
- Any necessary security considerations and the impacts of these measures on people with disabilities and other groups needs to be kept under consideration and may call for an objective approach
- If appropriate, implementing initiatives which could serve as “pull factors” towards safe and large outdoor spaces, such as outdoor art displays or other focal points.

- Signage and communications to highlight the busiest times to encourage pedestrians to visit busier areas at off-peak times.

In terms of managing pedestrian movement you should consider the following:

- Introducing one-way movement of pedestrians to maintain social distancing
- Signage to encourage pedestrians to wait and allow others to pass at entry ways or along footpaths
- The provision of separate entry and exit routes for pedestrian access with clear signs
- The enlargement of entrances and exits to minimise queues
- Opening additional entrances or exits if possible

In terms of managing queuing you should consider the following:

- Having defined areas to indicate where pedestrians should stand when queuing using spray markings or temporary barriers
- The provision of “Do not join the queue” signs provided at popular destinations, when capacity reached
- Where possible and safe to do so, how queues can be positioned in more sheltered areas, such as under awnings to protect those queuing from inclement weather

- Ensuring any changes to entries, exits and queue management take into account reasonable adjustments for those who need them, including people with disabilities

In terms of traffic management, you should consider the following:

- How traffic lanes could be closed, made one way or completely pedestrianised
- How delivery access and timing and essential access for works and maintenance should be scheduled
- Reducing car parking layout and spacing even if this means reducing capacity
- Suspending on-street parking to facilitate other measures.
- Additional parking or facilities such as bike racks, to reduce use of public transport
- Signage to inform pedestrians and road users of changes to road layouts
- Any security considerations, and the impact of measures on people with disabilities and other groups, need to be kept under consideration. (This includes access for blue badge holders and may call for a balanced approach.)

6. Regulatory and communication considerations

6.1 Regulatory considerations

As an owner and/or operator of urban centres and/or green spaces it is important to consider all relevant legal obligations before implementing interventions outlined by this guidance. As set out above, this guidance does not impose any legal obligations and there may be processes required prior to you being able to implement the guidance. These regulatory considerations may include, for example, those in relation to traffic management, planning and fire risk/safety.

6.2 Communication considerations

Owners/operators are advised to provide clear and concise information to the public on how to adhere to social distancing. They are advised to emphasise the latest government advice on safety procedures and carefully consider social distancing guidelines in public places. This could include:

- Using simple, clear and accessible images and messaging to explain guidelines, with consideration for groups whose first language may not be English or where alternative formats may be required

- Showing the maximum number of people who can queue safely (accounting for social distancing)
- Signs and announcements about safer travel and maintaining social distancing. Signs should be placed strategically to maximise impact
- Information on changes for disabled users and how they can continue to access public places in a safer way.
- Providing ambassadors/marshals/stewards or their equivalent in the busiest areas
- Marking appropriate spaces for queuing, accounting for queues and space required by neighbouring premises whilst taking security considerations into account

Owners/operators are advised to consider how they can gather feedback from the users of their spaces to ensure that the temporary interventions made are fit for purpose, and to identify any issues that may arise following implementation.

Appendix

As COVID-19 Guidance is regularly updated links below may change over time.

You should therefore in the first instance access COVID-19 Guidance at:

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) | nidirect](#)

Where to obtain further information:

General COVID-19 advice and guidance

NI Executive - Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Overview and advice

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): overview and advice | nidirect](#)

NI Executive - Moving Forward:

Pathway out of Restrictions

[The Executive's pathway out of restrictions | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Public Health Agency - COVID-19

[COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#)

Social distancing

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): staying safe outside your home | nidirect](#)

[RNIB and Guide Dogs launch guidance on social distancing for NI - RNIB](#)

[- See differently](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) regulations guidance: what the restrictions mean for you | nidirect](#)

Protecting people who are at higher risk

[Vulnerable people | nidirect](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): definitions of 'clinically extremely vulnerable' and 'vulnerable' | nidirect](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for 'clinically extremely vulnerable' and 'vulnerable' people | nidirect](#)

Face coverings

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): face coverings | nidirect](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): staying safe outside your home | nidirect](#)

[COVID-19: Information for the public | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#)

[How to make a cloth face covering - GOV. UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Hygiene

Hand washing and hand hygiene | nidirect

COVID-19: Information for the public | HSC Public Health Agency (hscni.net)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Safer public places - managing public outdoor settings - HYGIENE - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

(England)

Safer Public Places - Urban centres and Green spaces (England)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Safer public places - managing public outdoor settings - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Safer Public Places - urban centres and green spaces (Scotland)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance on safer public spaces - urban centres and green spaces - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Other sources of guidance

Cleaning

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Safer public places - managing public outdoor settings - CLEANING - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

(England)

Toilets

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Safer public places - managing public outdoor settings - TOILETS - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

(England)

COVID-19: ventilation of indoor spaces to stop the spread of coronavirus (England)

Coronavirus (COVID-19): opening public and customer toilets - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) (Scotland)

Sport and Outdoor Recreation

Covid-19: Guidance on the safe return of sport | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk)

COVID-19: Enjoy healthy and inspiring visits to our outdoors

Retail

Coronavirus: Guide to providing outdoor retail services (nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

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