

**Q:**

I normally live alone but my daughter has asked me to spend Christmas with her family. Can I do this? I feel anxious about the idea.

**A:**

Christmas isn't far away now and many people will be thinking about how they will be spending it this year.

The government initially stated that from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> December, it would be possible to join forces with up to two other households for the festive period; known as a Christmas bubble. However the government has changed the rules and it is now only possible to do this on Christmas Day. This only applies to those living in tiers 1 -3. Norwich is currently in tier 2 (High Alert). The rules are different if you live in a tier 4 area. The changes have been introduced because of the advice from scientific advisers regarding the danger of the virus spreading more swiftly if the Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed. One in three people with coronavirus show no symptoms but can spread the virus without knowing they are doing so.

The government has stressed the safest Christmas would be one spent within your own household or support bubble and we are being urged to think very carefully about the risks that we might face if we decide to form a Christmas bubble. We are being strongly encouraged to plan a smaller and shorter Christmas wherever possible. The less contact between people on 25<sup>th</sup> December the safer you will be. You shouldn't feel pressurised into taking part in any activities that would make you feel unsafe and you may need to have a chat with your daughter to express your concerns. All older people are at a higher risk of becoming severely unwell if they contract the virus. Each person's circumstances will be different and so it is important to consider your particular situation and needs when you are making your Christmas plans.

If you decide to go ahead and form a Christmas bubble, this will allow you to meet indoors at home, in the garden, a place of worship and outside in a public space. The new rules state that you cannot stay overnight and that you should keep your stay as short as possible. Once you decide on who will be in your Christmas bubble, you cannot change your mind later and you can't form other bubbles with different people at different times during Christmas day. If you want to see someone else during the Christmas period, you can do this but only outside in public spaces, in line with the local tier guidance. So for instance you could go for a walk with friends or another family member.

The government has said that we should keep our Christmas bubbles as local as possible and we shouldn't travel into a different tiered area. So you shouldn't travel to see your daughter if she lives in another part of the country.

As there is likely to be an increased risk of the virus spreading during the festive period it would be advisable to do the following:

- You and your Christmas bubble should try to minimise the exposure to the virus during the 2 weeks leading up to 25<sup>th</sup> December (avoid busy places and limiting who you see and for how long)
- Limit who you see from 26<sup>th</sup> December onwards to avoid the potential spread of the virus
- Plan a smaller and shorter Christmas meeting
- Keep indoor spaces where you are meeting well ventilated
- Consider online contact instead of face-to-face
- Remember social distancing rules even with your family
- Avoid physical contact – no hugging or kissing
- Wash/sanitise your hands as much as possible
- Sanitise door handles and other areas that are frequently touched
- Spend time outside together for example going for a walk
- Don't share food and drink
- Consider the activities that you are planning over this period – how risky will they be?
- Will anyone be particularly at high risk in your bubble? If you are clinically vulnerable try to reduce the numbers of people in your Christmas bubble and consider who might be more exposed to the virus (who has a public facing job etc)
- You may decide to wait for a few months before your family gets together. The vaccine programme is currently being rolled out and it may be safer to meet next year.

You can read the full guidance on the rules surrounding Christmas bubbles on the government website here - [Making a Christmas bubble with friends and family - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family) and general Christmas advice, including the rules regarding visiting bars, pubs and restaurants, places of worship, shops and Christmas events here - [Guidance for the Christmas period - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/christmas-period)