

Level 5 Questions & Answers

On Monday, the government announced the country will be moving to Level 5 of the *Plan for Living with COVID-19* this week. For staff, please see the framework document for full details of the Level.

This document contains the most relevant questions about this level that could be asked by older people, volunteers and staff grouped under the following headings:

- **Level 5 restrictions**
- **Volunteers visiting homes of older people**
- **Staff visiting homes of older people**

Level 5 restrictions

1. What does Level 5 mean?

Level 5 is the highest level under the Government's *Plan for Living with COVID-19*. We are moving to Level 5 (with some alterations) on Wednesday October 21st at midnight for 6 weeks.

Quick summary of the relevant information:

- No household visits but if you live alone you can form a 'support bubble' (see Question 2 and 3 below)
- Stay within 5 kilometres of your home with some exceptions (including but not limited to for medical appointments, food shopping, providing care, farming, visiting a grave)
- People will only be able to exercise within five kilometres of their home
- Essential retail and essential services (e.g. health and social work) will remain open
- Wet pubs* offer a take away or delivery only. *Wet pubs in Dublin remain closed
- **Those aged over 70 and the medically vulnerable are advised to continue to exercise personal judgement.** It is recommended to shop during designated hours only, while wearing a face covering, and to avoid public transport.
- Up to 25 can attend funerals

2. Under Level 5 those who are at risk of isolation can form a 'support bubble'. What is a support bubble?

To support those who risk isolation and to help those who live on their own, a 'Support Bubble' will apply for the duration of Level 5. In certain situations, (see below) you can form a bubble with 1 other household (of any size).

You can then act as one extended household.

A support bubble can also be referred to as a "social bubble".

3. Who can form a support bubble?

You can form a support bubble with another household in any of the following situations which may be relevant to the older people we work with:

- If they live alone
- if they live with a partner who they provide care for, for example a partner with dementia

- If they live alone and have a carer or carers who supports them including a live-in carer

4. How do you form a support bubble?

- Identify all the households within your network and the older person you support (i.e. the households that visit both your homes regularly; be it daughters, sons, neighbours, friends etc.)
- Identify one household that will form a support bubble with you and confirm they wish to do so.

Support bubbles can only be formed with a household that is not already part of a support bubble. Ideally choose a household support bubble that lives nearby, but the **household can be outside the 5 kilometre limit.**

If your older person will not be forming a social bubble, no visitors are allowed to their home or garden with the exception of visits for essential purpose i.e. Care being provided, so befriending visits are suspended in this case. Volunteers can still meet their older person outside if they live within 5 kilometres of one another and they maintain social distancing distance and adhering to the guidelines for example if you went for a walk together.

5. I am older person who lives alone. I have HSE carers who visit and both my son and daughter come to provide essential care for them every week. Is this ok as both my son and daughter come from different households?

If the older person has informal carers; family or others who provide **essential care** to support them living in their home (for example to support them with activities of daily living) this care must continue as normal.

If their son or daughter visits for **social reasons only**, they are allowed one other household besides their formal carer, so in this example either the son **or** daughter (and their household) can visit and be part of the 'Support Bubble'.

6. Can I meet someone outside my social bubble?

It is possible to meet with 1 other household in an outdoor setting which is not a home or garden, such as a park, including for exercise. No other social or family gatherings should take place.

Older people and their volunteer could go for a walk together for example if they live within the 5 kilometre radius and are adhering to all health guidelines and keeping the recommended distance apart.

7. What to do if someone in your support bubble develops symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive

- Stay at home.
- If you experience any symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, lost or changed sense of smell) ring your GP. If you are very short of breath and cannot reach the GP service, call the emergency services on 112 or 999.
- If you or someone in your support bubble is contacted by the HSE or your local Department of Public Health, you should follow their guidance.
- The older person you visit may need to ask someone outside their support bubble for help with shopping, medication etc. Does the local shop do deliveries? You can always ring ALONE for help.

Volunteers visiting homes of older people

ALONE volunteers play a huge role in the lives of the older people they visit. A volunteer's visit may be the only social contact an older person has that week. Taking account, the instances above (Question 3) where older people can form a Support Bubble, talk to your older person and ask them about their social network and what household may be suitable to join their support bubble.

Whether you are in the older person's Support Bubble or not, we would ask you to:

- Considering your own personal circumstances during Level 5 and those of your family
- Consider how the support you normally provide to your older person can continue or may need to change
- Contact the older person you support to discuss the Level 5 restrictions, the impact they will have on them and identify what steps they need to take to make sure they remain connected and supported
- Ensure that the older person has identified how they can be supported in the coming weeks. Remain in regular contact if you are not visiting the older person by phoning your older person at least twice a week and/or providing practical support to them.

8. The older person I visit has no family or support except for me, their volunteer. They have asked me to be a part of their support bubble. What do I need to do?

We recognise some of the older people we work with are very vulnerable and may want to form a Support Bubble with you. If it is possible for you to join a bubble with the older person in line with guidelines, you can do so provided this arrangement suits you and the older person.

If you or the individual themselves have concerns in regards safeguarding and/or continuity of care for the older person, please contact 0818 222 024 or email us at volunteer@alone.ie and a member of staff will be in touch with you to discuss and support the most appropriate response in the circumstances.

9. The older person I visit has asked me to be in their support bubble, but I am unable to do this. How best can I support the older person I visit during this time?

- Talk to your older person and explain the reasons (if possible) why you are unable to join their support bubble
- Ask have they anyone else who can support them? Discuss through their options and see if you both can identify a household who will be able to join their support bubble.

If a household cannot be identified to form a support bubble:

- Ensure the older person will be able to organise groceries, medication, fuel etc. Could you drop off groceries? Could a neighbour? Could the older person get groceries delivered by the local shop? Confirm the plan for the next couple of weeks
- Schedule in two weekly check in calls with the older person. If the older person has access to WhatsApp, video call them.
- Please encourage all older people to get outdoors where possible and to chat to family, friends and their volunteer over the phone.

If you think the older person is in need of any additional support at any point over the next 6 weeks, please contact ALONE.

10. Is it still ok for me as a volunteer to deliver food, medication (practical supports) to the older person I visit/support even if I am not part of their social bubble?

Yes, provided you follow the protocols for delivering practical supports (leaving the goods at the door etc.)

Staff visiting homes of older people

Staff will conduct assessments over the phone. There may be some in-house visits in exceptional cases where there are safeguarding issues or a risk to the continuity of care/support for the individual.