

Census 2021 – Questions members of the public may ask you

This guide is to help local authority (LA) staff respond to any queries from the public about the census. It's particularly aimed at public-facing staff, such as your customer service team.

Please note

The information in this document is correct at the time of writing. Should developments related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) or other unforeseen circumstances require us to change our approach to Census 2021, we will endeavour to update you as they occur.

We're creating detailed plans to assess risks related to COVID-19 and developing robust and appropriate contingency measures. These will ensure the safety of all involved and make sure that the census runs smoothly. We will share these with you at the relevant times and implement them when required.

Questions you might get asked

The following questions are provided to help local authority staff answer any queries that members of the public may have about Census 2021. The responses are written as direct replies to the public in order to offer clear and concise information that's relevant to them. Your public-facing staff can use these replies to inform their answers to any questions they get as well as direct individuals to further support.

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What is the census?

The census is a unique survey of all the people and households in England and Wales that happens every 10 years. There's simply nothing else that gives so much detail about us and the society we live in. It tells us what our needs are now and what they're likely to be in the future. It also gives a snapshot of how we live, for future generations to look back on.

The information given by the public during the census helps local authorities plan and fund public services. It informs where billions of pounds are spent, for instance on things like roads, schools and hospitals.

Information from the census is also important in helping lots of other people and organisations do their work. Charity and voluntary organisations often use it as evidence to get funding. It helps businesses to understand us as customers and, for example, decide where to open new shops. Plus, those doing research, like university students and people looking into their family history, use the information.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) plans and runs the census in England and Wales, working with other statistical agencies to create a clear picture of the UK. We report directly to the UK parliament, but we do not work for any political parties.

Visit the census website at www.census.gov.uk to find out more about Census 2021.

Where can I find out more about the census?

You can visit the Census 2021 website at www.census.gov.uk where you will find out all about the census. When it's time to complete your census, the ONS will add a link on the front page of the website that you can use to fill in your census questionnaire online. The website also contains our online help section, which covers everything from who to include on the questionnaire, to how to answer each question.

If you cannot find what you're looking for, there is also a dedicated contact centre where we're on hand to help. You can get in touch with the ONS by phone, webchat, email, social media or text message. You can visit the Census 2021 website at www.census.gov.uk to find details of how to contact us.

Why should I take part in the census?

It's really important that you take part in the census. By taking part, you will help make sure you and your community get the services needed now and in the future.

The information given by the public during the census informs where billions of pounds are spent, for instance on things like roads, schools and hospitals. Information from the census is also important in helping lots of other people and organisations do their work.

Charity and voluntary organisations often use it as evidence to get funding. It helps businesses to understand us as customers and, for example, decide where to open new shops. Plus, those doing research, like university students and people looking into their family history, use the information. Without the census, it would be much more difficult to do this.

In addition, if you live in England and Wales, you must fill in the census form by law or you could be fined up to £1,000.

Visit [census online help](#) for more information about why you must fill in your census questionnaire.

Who should fill in the census?

The householder should fill in the census for the household.

This is the person who owns or rents (or jointly owns or rents) the property, or the person who is responsible (or jointly responsible) for paying household bills and expenses.

If you're the householder, you will have to answer a few questions about your household before moving on to questions about each individual. Anyone living in the household can fill in these questions on their own if they want to. You can also save the census and come back to finish it off later.

In addition, anyone included in a household who wants to keep their information private can complete an individual questionnaire. They can request an individual access code online or through the contact centre.

Visit [census online help](#) for more information about who is responsible for filling in the census and instructions on how to complete an individual questionnaire.

What do I need to do with the census questionnaire?

Census 2021 is a digital-first census. If you got a letter in the post with a 16-digit access code on it, you can use this code to log in on the Census 2021 website.

You will have to answer a few questions about your household before moving on to questions about each individual. Anyone living in the household can fill in these questions on their own if they want to. You can also save the questionnaire and come back to finish it off later.

The information you provide needs to be about who usually lives in the household on Census Day, which is Sunday 21 March 2021. You can submit your questionnaire on Census Day or as soon as possible after. If you need to, you can complete your questionnaire before 21 March. If your household circumstances change on Census Day, you can let the ONS know.

In addition, anyone included in a household who wants to keep their information private can complete an individual questionnaire. They can request an individual access code online or through the contact centre.

There will be help available at our Census Support Centres to fill in your questionnaire. You can request a paper version if you prefer and return it using the envelope provided. You can visit the Census 2021 website at www.census.gov.uk to request one. There's also support available in different languages and accessible formats.

Who do I include in the census questionnaire?

You should answer the individual questions in the Household Questionnaire for:

- anyone who lives with you permanently or counts your address as their family home
- people temporarily away from home, for example students or schoolchildren boarding away
- people staying with you temporarily if they live in the UK and have no other address
- people staying with you temporarily from outside of the UK who are staying in the country for three months or more

There's also a separate section to fill in on visitors – that is anyone staying with you overnight on Census Day: Sunday 21 March 2021.

Visit [census online help](#) for more details about who should be included in the questionnaire.

What if I'm having trouble getting online to complete the census?

Census 2021 is a digital-first census, and we'd like to help you take part online. If you're not confident online, or do not have a computer, smartphone or tablet, you can go to a local Census Support Centre. There you can get help to fill in the online questionnaire. If you have your own laptop, smartphone or tablet, you can bring them along or use one of the devices at the centre.

Alternatively, if you cannot fill in the questionnaire online, you can ask for a paper version.

I've lost my census letter. How do I get a new access code?

You can request a new access code to start a new census if you have lost or not received an access code. Visit the Census 2021 website at www.census.gov.uk and choose to receive your new access code by post or text.

Where can I get help with translations into another language for the census?

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is offering support and guidance in a range of different languages. If you need help in a language other than English and Welsh, you can call the language helpline.

Will someone visit my home during Census 2021?

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for running the census in England and Wales. We are committed to ensuring that everyone is kept safe as they take part.

This will be a digital-first census and we will be encouraging people to respond online if they can. We have seen through the pandemic how many households and services have successfully switched to online only and we will be encouraging people to respond online if they can.

The census field operation, which follows up with people who haven't yet completed their questionnaire and may need help, will be carried out without anyone ever needing to enter anyone's home. All contacts with the public will be socially distanced and our field staff will be equipped with PPE in line with government guidance.

The ONS will be following the government's safety guidelines about the coronavirus (COVID-19) throughout the census period.

Visit [census online help](#) for more information about our field staff operations during Census 2021.

How will I know my data is safe with the census?

The census asks questions about you, your home and the people who live in it. The census has a proud 200-year history of keeping this personal information safe.

At the Office for National Statistics (ONS), we have a strict security regime that follows government standards. This includes physical and IT security measures to protect your data, covering people, processes and technology.

When the ONS publishes statistics from the census, they're completely anonymous. We do not include any personal information and you cannot be identified via census data. Your personal census information is protected by law. It is a crime for anyone to share it.

Government departments dealing with any applications you've made, or any payments or services you receive, cannot see your census information. For example, it cannot be used to influence benefit claims, a residency application, immigration status or taxes. Private organisations and individuals such as landlords will not have access to your personal information.

Visit [census online help](#) for more information about how the ONS keep your personal information safe.

Where can I get more help or advice about the census?

You can visit the census website at www.census.gov.uk to find out more about Census 2021. You can also get in touch with us by webchat, email, social media or text message.

When do I need to fill in my census?

Census 2021 asks everyone in England and Wales the same questions about the same day: Census Day, Sunday 21 March 2021.

The information you provide needs to be about who usually lives in the household on Census Day. You can submit your questionnaire on Census Day or as soon as possible after. If you need to, you can complete your questionnaire before 21 March. If your household circumstances change on Census Day, you can let us know.

Visit [census online help](#) for more information about when to fill in your census questionnaire.

Can I fill in the census for someone else who needs help?

Yes, you're allowed to complete a census for someone who's asked for help. The person you're helping will have a letter or a paper questionnaire. Both contain an access code, so you can complete online even if they have a paper version.

If possible, read the questions aloud to them and complete the questionnaire with the answers they give you. Allow plenty of time. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) recommends that you read back the answers to them, so they can check they're right.

If you're this person's carer or you have lasting power of attorney, you have a responsibility to act in their best interest under the Mental Capacity Act 2005. At the ONS, we consider it to be in the person's best interests for you to complete the census for them if they can't do it for themselves.

You can visit [census online help](#) for further guidance on completing a census for someone who lacks the capacity to do it as well as additional information about helping someone else fill in their census.

The contact centre

The contact centre is a vital source of public support. It offers help over the phone, via webchat and SMS text message, and through the '[Contact Us](#)' form on our website.

The contact centre goes live on 1 March 2021. There will be separate lines for England and Wales, plus a language helpline, text relay and short text numbers.

Contact centre for those living in England	0800 141 2021
England NGT (text relay service)	(18001) 0800 141 2021
Language helpline	0800 587 2021
The contact centre is UK-based and free to call.	

The contact centre can be used by individuals themselves, or by a trusted family member or friend on their behalf. This includes community contacts who are offering help. Field staff from the ONS can also call on behalf of someone if needed.

The contact centre can help with many tasks, including:

- resolving general and specialist queries from the public
- providing new or additional questionnaires, letters and leaflets, such as household paper questionnaires, individual paper questionnaire, household continuation forms and large print questionnaires
- providing language translation booklets, braille guidance booklets and easy read leaflets
- interpretation services
- assisting individuals to complete the census over the telephone. This can be done straight away when the individual calls, or at a later date via an appointment

The contact centre opens on 1 March 2021. The hours of opening are:

- 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday
- 8am – 1pm Saturdays
- 8am – 8pm on Saturday and Sunday on Census weekend (20 and 21 March 2021)

An appointment system will be used for lengthier calls during peak times.

Lines close to the public on 8 July 2021.