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May Day, or the bank holiday?

People still dance around maypoles on the first of May. The official UK holiday, though, is listed as the Early May bank holiday — and it is not always on the 1st.

The National Trust says the May Day bank holiday was instituted by Michael Foot, then the Labour Employment Secretary, in 1978. GOV.UK's current list labels the same early-May holiday "Early May bank holiday." It does not use the words "May Day" on that page.

In 2026 the holiday is Monday 4 May. In 2027 it is Monday 3 May. In 2028, 1 May falls on a Monday, and that Monday is the Early May bank holiday. Most years it is a Monday at the start of May. In 2020 it was a Friday: GOV.UK lists Friday 8 May 2020 as the Early May bank holiday, marked for VE Day.

GOV.UK also says that if a bank holiday falls on a weekend, a substitute weekday becomes a bank holiday, normally the following Monday. And: "Your employer does not have to give you paid leave on bank or public holidays."

A date worth remembering

In 2023 the Early May bank holiday was Monday 1 May. A separate "Bank holiday for the coronation of King Charles III" fell a week later, on Monday 8 May. They are two holidays on the same official list.

A short quiz

1. What does GOV.UK call the early May holiday?
2. When does the National Trust say the holiday was instituted?
3. What day of the week was the Early May bank holiday in 2020?

Answers. 1. Early May bank holiday. 2. In 1978, by Michael Foot. 3. A Friday, 8 May, marked for VE Day.

Wording from GOV.UK, "UK bank holidays," and the National Trust, "The history of May Day," both checked 17 November 2026.
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