

## Shielding Advice

The NHS has written to around 1.3million people considered to be at highest clinical risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) to inform them that they should stay at home at all times and avoid all face-to-face contact for a period of at least 12 weeks. This is known as ‘shielding’. This advice is set out in the **Public Health England guidance**.

The GPs and hospital clinicians looking after people in these groups have also been informed of who is included in the highest clinical risk group. They have been asked to review their patient lists and to add in anyone else who they think should be considered at highest clinical risk and advised to shield.

People falling into this highest clinical risk group include:

- Solid organ transplant recipients.
- People with specific cancers:
  - people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
  - people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
  - people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
  - people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
  - people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
  - people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, **severe** asthma and **severe** chronic obstructive pulmonary (COPD).
- People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as Severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell).
- People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
- Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

### **I am in one of the highest clinical risk groups, so what do I do now?**

You are strongly encouraged to follow the guidance issued by Public Health England, as set out in the letter you have received – stay at home and avoid all face-to face contact for the next 12 weeks. This approach is called ‘shielding’.

If you have any concerns or queries about the content of the letter you have received, your condition, what shielding involves, or what this might mean for you, please get in touch with your GP or hospital clinician in the first instance.

All people who have received the letter should register with the Government’s website: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>. This will help you to access support with

activities such as obtaining food packages or medications. Even if you do not need any support with daily tasks, please do register with this website to let Government know your current situation. If you do not register you may receive a phone call to ask whether you need any help.

Please note that patients are being added to the central data base all the time. There may be a delay between you being identified as highest risk, receiving a letter and then being recognised by the Government website and phone line as someone who is eligible for support.

If you experience a delay and require urgent help in obtaining food or medication during this period, please contact your local council where you will find information about help available in your area.

**I think I should be considered as highest clinical risk, but I haven't received a letter. What should I do?**

Most people who are within the highest clinical risk group will have a letter from the NHS. However, we know that central records do not capture everybody in this group. GPs and hospital clinicians have been asked to help identify and contact additional people who meet the clinical criteria, but who have not been picked up through the initial central process for any reason. It may take time for letters to reach patients identified by their GPs and hospital clinicians, and for those individuals to then be recognised on the Government support website.

If you think you should be considered as highest clinical risk (i.e you have one of the conditions listed above) you should register with [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). In the meantime, you may wish to follow Public Health England's guidance on 'shielding'.

**I have been told that I am not considered to be at highest clinical risk, but I still want to be in the shielding group. What should I do?**

If you are not considered by healthcare professionals to be at the highest clinical risk but nevertheless wish to follow 'shielding' advice then this is a personal decision that you are, of course, free to make and to follow as far as possible.

However, Government advice is that people who are not included in the shielding group but who are on the broader list of conditions (below), follow strict social distancing measures instead.

This is because shielding is a severe intervention which may be difficult to adhere to for such a long period of time, and the additional benefit gained from this extra measure needs to be weighed against any impact on your mental and physical wellbeing from a significant loss of social contact and needing to stay in the home for a long period of time. The Government's nationally coordinated food and medicines delivery service is only available to those in the shielding group

People who are considered in a wider vulnerable group (sometimes referred to as the 'flu group') but are not in the highest clinical risk registry (or shielding group) are:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (i.e. for adults this usually anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):

- o chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
- o chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- o chronic kidney disease
- o chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- o chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
- o diabetes
- o problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed
- o a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- o being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above)
- o those who are pregnant

There are other sources of support for patients:

- NHS Volunteer Responders: you can submit a live referral for an individual that needs support or an NHS service that requires volunteers providing they meet the referring criteria at <https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHSreferral> or on 0808 196 3382.

Volunteers can provide:

- o Check in and chat support – short-term telephone support to individuals who are at risk of loneliness because of self-isolation (note, this is not mental health advice).
  - o Community support – collection of shopping, medication, or other essential supplies for someone who is self-isolating, and delivering these supplies to their home.
  - o Patient Transport – transport to take patients home who are medically fit for discharge.
  - o NHS Transport – who will deliver medicines on behalf of the community pharmacy or dispensing doctor.
- Health at home – is a webpage that gives them an overview of NHS services that are available, such as how to order repeat prescriptions online and get them delivered. <https://www.nhs.uk/health-at-home>

- Public Health England have provided some guidance on looking after mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

- Local councils are working with voluntary sector organisations and local communities to support residents in the response to COVID-19. <https://www.wirral.gov.uk>
- The government has provided advice on employment and financial support on their website: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Up to date information can be found on the following website:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/20200402-FAQs-Patients-vFINAL.pdf>