

## **Government advice change for shielded patients**

On Monday June 22, 2020, the government announced changes that will be made for patients that have been shielding due to the coronavirus lockdown. Measures will be eased for these people from Monday July 6.

Below are some FAQs which may help

You can also find more information on the GOV.UK website

### **Will I hear more information about what this means for me?**

The government will be writing to all individuals on the Shielded Patient List with updated information on shielding advice and the ongoing support that will be available to them. This will take place over the course of the next few weeks.

### **What is being eased for shielded patients?**

From **Monday 6 July**, those shielding from coronavirus can gather in groups of up to 6 people outdoors and form a 'support bubble' with another household.

Those who are shielding and live alone or are single parents with children will also be able to create a 'support bubble' with one other household of any size, following the same rules already in place for the wider population.

While this group of clinically extremely vulnerable people should continue to follow strict social distancing measures, they will be able to participate in more activities such as visiting shops and places of worship.

From **Saturday 1 August**, the guidance will then be relaxed so clinically extremely vulnerable people will no longer be advised to shield.

### **Will I still get my government shielding support package?**

The government's shielding support package will remain in place until July 31, after this people will no longer be advised to shield.

Support will remain available from NHS volunteers and local councils. People will retain their priority for supermarket delivery slots, and still be able to access help with shopping, medication, phone calls and transport to medical appointments.

### **I am unable to work from home and am concerned I will be asked to go back to my workplace – can I get a sick note?**

The government is asking employers to ease the transition for their clinically extremely vulnerable employees, ensuring that robust measures are put in place for those currently shielding to return to work when they are able to do so.

For anyone concerned about returning to work once the guidance has eased, we recommend they speak with their employer to understand their specific policies in

relation to Covid-19. You should discuss your situation and agree a plan for returning to work and adjustments that may be needed before you return.

You can get advice on your specific situation and employment rights by visiting the Acas website <https://www.acas.org.uk/contact> or calling the Acas helpline, 0300 123 1100.

From 1 August, the government will no longer advise people to shield because they are clinically extremely vulnerable. This means that from 1 August individuals who are currently shielding will be able to return to work. Therefore, you will no longer be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay on the basis of being clinically extremely vulnerable.

### **What if there is a second peak or local peak?**

The government has said it will maintain the Shielded Patient List. Should the level of the disease in the community rise in the future, it may be necessary to advise that more restrictive measures should be taken in order for those at highest risk to keep themselves safe. If there is a significant change to the advice, the government will write to all patients who are clinically extremely vulnerable setting out any changes to advice before they are made.

### **Am I clinically vulnerable?**

Clinically extremely vulnerable people may include:

1. Solid organ transplant recipients.
2. 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
3. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
4. People with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell).
5. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
6. Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.
7. Other people have also been classed as clinically extremely vulnerable, based on clinical judgement and an assessment of their needs. GPs and

hospital clinicians have been provided with guidance to support these decisions.

More information about who has been classed as clinically extremely vulnerable is available on the NHS Digital website.

### **You are not clinically extremely vulnerable if:**

- you do not have any of the conditions that make you clinically extremely vulnerable
- you have not been told by your GP or specialist that you are clinically extremely vulnerable or received a letter

### **Can I exercise outside? If so, how often and for how long?**

Yes, from 1 June the shielding guidance was updated to advise that those classed as clinically extremely vulnerable may wish to spend time outdoors, including for exercise. From 6 July, this can be in a group of up to 6 people (including people they don't live with).

If you do go out, you should take extra care to minimise contact with others by maintaining social distancing. This can be in a public outdoor space, or in a private garden or uncovered yard or terrace.

There is no advised limit to how often and how long to spend outside, that is up to you, but you should follow social distancing guidelines and always robustly practise good, frequent hand washing.

### **I will still need help with food and medicine after the shielding restrictions have been lifted – what support is there?**

Ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services.

If you'd like help with your shopping, NHS Volunteer Responders are also here for you.

You can choose what products you want and when you want them and an NHS Volunteer Responder will then pick up and deliver your shopping to you. They can also pick up prescriptions or any other essentials you need. Call 0808 196 3646 (8am to 8pm) to arrange volunteer support. You can also contact the Isle of Wight support helpline on 01983 823 600 between 9am and 5pm, 7 days a week.

### **Getting your prescriptions**

Prescriptions will continue to cover the same length of time as usual.

If you do not currently have your prescriptions collected or delivered, you can arrange this by:

1. Asking someone who can pick up your prescription from the local pharmacy (this is the best option, if possible).
2. Contacting your pharmacy to ask them to deliver your prescription to you or to help you find a volunteer (who will have been ID checked) to deliver it.

**Can my child now go back to school? Will my child be able to go back to school from September if they are no longer required to shield?**

At this time, the government is not advising shielding children to return to school/nursery. In due course, the government will be publishing guidance on the wider re-opening of education in September.

**I am a shielding parent, does this mean my child can go back to school/nursery?**

For now, if a young person or staff member lives in a household with someone who is extremely clinically vulnerable, as set out in the guidance on shielding, it is advised they only attend an education or childcare setting if stringent social distancing can be adhered to. If this is not possible then we do not expect those individuals to attend. They should be supported to learn or work at home.

In due course, the government will be publishing guidance on the wider returning of education in September.

**What if I don't / my child doesn't feel safe going back to school, do they have to go back?**

The government is gradually increasing the numbers of children and young people attending schools and colleges. The decision is based on the latest scientific advice. There is guidance for education and childcare settings to welcome back children and young people, focusing on measures that settings can put in place to help limit the risk of the virus spreading.

Parents should notify their nursery/school/college as normal if their child is unable to attend so that staff can explore the reason with them and address barriers together. Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time.

**Will it be compulsory to take up places in Early Years settings for those children who are eligible? What if I don't feel safe sending my child back?**

At this time, the government is not advising shielding children to return to school/nursery. In due course, the government will be publishing guidance on the wider re-opening of education in September.

Attendance at early years settings will continue to be voluntary and non-statutory, though the government encourages parents to send in their children to early years settings, as they would normally, as long as they are not self-isolating.

**Will it be compulsory to take up an invitation to attend school, college or other Further Education setting for those children or young people who are eligible?**

At this time, the government is not advising shielding children to return to school/nursery. In due course, the government will be publishing guidance on the wider re-opening of education in September.

Eligible children and young people – including priority groups (vulnerable children and young people and children of critical workers) - are strongly encouraged to attend their education setting. This does not apply to those who are self-isolating or shielding. Parents should notify their nursery/school/college as normal if their child is unable to attend so that staff can explore the reason with them and address barriers together. Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time.

**I am classed as a shielded patient but do not want to wait until July or August to go out – can I go out now?**

Shielding is for your personal protection and it's your choice to decide whether to follow the measures advised by the government.