

Shielding

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is it really safe to stop shielding?

We have been clear that each step towards relaxing the shielding guidance should be taken carefully. People classed as clinically extremely vulnerable are still at risk of severe illness if they catch Coronavirus and should continue to take precautions, but the risk of catching Coronavirus is now sufficiently low, the Government believe that the time is now right to further relax the advice. The latest epidemiological data from the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey shows that the chances of encountering Coronavirus in the community has continued to decline. Four weeks ago, on average only one person in 500 had the virus. Last week it was less than one in 1700. In addition, a test and trace system is now in place, including within schools, and there are robust measures in place to manage potential areas of higher risk.

2. Can I keep shielding if I want to?

The guidance for those classed as clinically extremely vulnerable continues to be advisory, and we have no plans to enforce it, so you can continue shielding if you want to. However, centrally provided food boxes and the Medicines Delivery Service will only be available while the advice is to shield, which is currently until the end of July.

Beyond July, NHS Volunteer Responders can continue to help with collecting food shopping and medicines deliveries. Simply call NHS Volunteer Responders on 0808 196 3646 (8 am to 8pm) to access this support.

3. Can I go to all my hospital appointments now?

The NHS is preparing to gradually increase some important face-to-face services, but only where this can be done safely. Hospitals and other health facilities have been asked to put extra planning and protection in place for people who are at highest risk from Covid-19. These measures should be discussed with you in advance.

Where possible, appointments will be offered using remote services such as a video or phone consultation. If you do need to attend hospital for planned (non-emergency) care, you will be asked to take some steps to ensure you can get the care you need in an environment that keeps you safe, as well as staff and other patients.

- **Admissions (including day surgery):** if you are being admitted to hospital, you and any members of your household will be asked to isolate at home for 14 days prior. Where possible, you may be asked to complete a test within 72 hours before going to hospital. If you are unable to isolate effectively or be tested before coming to hospital, your admission may be rescheduled. This will be determined by your care team using clinical judgement and in consultation with you. Admissions teams will give you all the information you need when booking you.

- **Outpatient appointments:** you should only attend your outpatient appointment if you have no symptoms of Coronavirus. While at the hospital/health facility, it is important that you comply with normal social distancing requirements.

4. Can I return to work?

Until the end of July, if you have been able to work at home, you should continue to do so. At this time, we do not advise clinically extremely vulnerable individuals to attend their place of work (workplace/'onsite') if this requires them to leave their home. This guidance remains advisory.

From 1 August the Government is planning to further relax advice to those shielding, bringing it in line with the advice to the clinically vulnerable group. This means that if they are unable to work from home but can work on site, they should do so, provided the business is COVID-safe.

5. What if I don't want to return to work?

You should look to come to an agreement with your employer and understand their specific policies around health and safety and workplace attendance, especially in relation to COVID-19.

If you have concerns about your health and safety at work, you can raise them with any union safety representatives, or ultimately with the organisation responsible for enforcement in your workplace, either the Health and Safety Executive or your local authority.

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

6. I still need help with my food shopping?

Those in receipt of centrally provided food boxes, who continue to need help, will receive this support while they are advised to shield, until the end of July. This will give those shielding the time to adapt to advice that visiting shops, including supermarkets, is likely to be as safe as when they stopped these usual daily activities, provided they follow social distancing advice.

Beyond July, NHS Volunteer Responders can continue to help with collecting food shopping. Simply call NHS Volunteer Responders on 0808 196 3646 (8 am to 8pm) to access this support.

The Government also continues to support the use of priority delivery slots to help the clinically most vulnerable where possible. Priority delivery slots are at the discretion of supermarkets, but we can confirm that seven supermarkets have given access to priority supermarket delivery slots that will continue beyond the end of July for those already signed up for support.

7. Can my children go back to school?

From 1 August the Government is planning to further relax advice to those shielding, bringing it in line with the advice to the clinically vulnerable group. This means that children can return to school/nursery. Where possible children should maintain social distancing and try and practise good, frequent hand washing. The latest advice can be found on GOV.UK.

8. When might you bring shielding back?

The latest scientific evidence shows that the chances of encountering Coronavirus in the community has continued to decline. The Government regularly monitors this position and if the rates of infection in the community rise, then it may be necessary to advise that more restrictive measures should be taken.

9. What is the guidance for the clinically vulnerable?

Public safety throughout this period is the Government's top priority – this includes keeping safe society's most vulnerable. We advise those who are clinically vulnerable to follow the Staying Alert and Safe social distancing guidance available on the gov.uk website. The advice is to stay at home as much as possible and, if you do go out, take particular care to minimise contact with others outside your household or support bubble. By this we mean always staying 2m apart from others outside your household or support bubble, avoiding crowds, and keeping your hands and face as clean as possible.

10. Is the letter I've received real, telling me that I don't need to shield anymore?

The letter you have received is from Government, signed by Matt Hancock and Robert Jenrick. This letter will have arrived between 24 and 26 June. You can find a copy of the letter online at gov.uk.

11. Where can I find accessible or alternative formats of my shielding letter?

Translated, BSL and easy read versions of the letter can soon be found at gov.uk. If a patient is blind or partially sighted they can access audio or braille formats by calling the RNIB helpline at 0303 123 9999.