

Measures to shield high risk groups from Coronavirus

Recent government [guidance on shielding](#) confirmed that people at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) should consider measures to mitigate their potential exposure to coronavirus. Patients falling into these groups should have received a letter from the NHS confirming their shielding status. An [exercise](#) was performed by NHSE to identify such patients from clinical coding systems. A 'COVID19 at risk register' was established for such patients.

Being on the 'COVID19 at risk register' and being informed of the shielding advice helps and protects patients in 3 ways:

1. It advises them to shield with the benefit of hopefully reducing their chances of contracting the virus.
2. It provides evidence for patients to employers that they should not be expected to attend their workplace. The evidence is in two parts- their letter and their registration on the 'at risk' register. This does not stop patients being able to work from home of course if they are able to do this and remain well.
3. Systems are being put in place to provide help to those that need it in order to properly shield. This includes priority for these patients for food and medicine deliveries. Patients will be advised how to access this once on the register. Where possible patients should be encouraged to ask family and friends for help with food and medicine deliveries due to what will no doubt be a limited resource. Help is promised however for those that need it. This assistance will facilitate complete shielding to be undertaken without the need to leave the house for shopping or medicines. Patients should also contact their local pharmacies for assistance re medicine deliveries where possible.

Other important information

- Shielding will be a more difficult thing to achieve for some patients than others. With duration of at least 12 weeks it is a long time to be potentially isolated for some. Patients are entirely free to choose whether or not they follow this advice.
- Some patients will receive shielding letters twice being picked up centrally and by their specialists. This is better than no letter at all.
- Inevitably some patients will receive a shielding letter when truly they do not need to shield. For example, it has been agreed to include all sarcoidosis patients for shielding advice. This is because in timeframes given, going through individual cases was not feasible to find those that did not need to shield. Colleagues must thus be prepared to receive phone call enquiries from some patients questioning whether they truly need to shield or not. It may be necessary to refer those calls on to colleagues in treating specialities where consultants or specialist nurses will need to assess those individual cases and provide advice as needed on a case by case basis.

- Some patients that are extremely vulnerable have not been picked up through central systems. Patients have been encouraged to register themselves and if they meet the Public Health England criteria, will be placed on the 'at risk register' and be able to access the same services. <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>. Separate advice for the devolved nations is available from this website.
- Any patient can choose to shield if they feel the need to do so. Only patients on the register however will be eligible to get government support (food and medicine deliveries).
- The [shielding for vulnerable people website](#) gives other useful information for patients. E.g. about how to manage a situation where one person in a household needs to shield but others do not and may even going out to work into situations where COVID exposure may occur e.g. working in the NHS. In short, these two people are advised to practice social distancing within their homes (see sheet 4).
- Detailed further information on the process that NHSE followed and some FAQs about shielding is available [here](#).

Much of this information is available on speciality websites, eg the [British Thoracic Society](#), which we would like to acknowledge.



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