

Coronavirus: shielding and vulnerable people

Anyone who's at high risk of getting a severe illness if they catch coronavirus (COVID-19) – 'clinically vulnerable people' – should take particularly strict social distancing measures.

Although everyone is advised to practise social distancing, it's particularly important for those in a vulnerable group.

Employers must be especially careful and take extra steps for anyone in their workforce who is in a vulnerable group.

They include, but are not limited to, those who:

- have a long-term health condition, for example asthma, diabetes, heart disease, hepatitis, Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis (MS)
- have a weakened immune system as the result of medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- are pregnant
- are aged 70 or over
- are seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)

For more about social distancing:

- in England, see [social distancing guidance on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see [NHS inform Scotland](#)
- in Wales, see [Welsh Government advice](#)

[Find advice on pregnancy and coronavirus from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.](#)

Shielding for extremely vulnerable people

Some people will have been told by their health service or doctor that they should take extra steps to protect (or 'shield') themselves because of an underlying health condition. This is for people who are at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus ('clinically extremely vulnerable').

Any details about the employee or worker's medical condition must be kept confidential, unless the employee or worker says it can be shared.

Shielding is paused in England and Scotland

From 1 August 2020, shielding has been paused in England and Scotland.

Employees and workers in England and Scotland are no longer eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) on the basis of being advised to shield by the government.

Shielding continues in Wales

In Wales, shielding will continue until at least 16 August 2020. Employees or workers should talk to their employer as soon as they can if they:

- have been told to start shielding
- think they might be told to start shielding

If an employee or worker is told to start shielding, they should stay at home for as long as they're advised to.

If they cannot work from home during this time, it might be possible for their employer to put them on ['furlough' \(temporary leave\)](#).

Employers should support staff following shielding guidelines. This might be a distressing or difficult time, so it's important for employers to [keep in touch during any absence](#).

Returning to the workplace after shielding

Employees and workers who have stopped shielding may be able to return to the workplace if it's safe.

Anyone who's been shielding should talk to their employer as soon as possible about plans to help them return.

If they can continue to work from home, the employer should support this.

If working from home is not possible, options might include:

- the employer putting extra measures in place to keep the person safe in the workplace
- the person taking up an alternative role
- temporarily changing the person's working patterns

If it's not possible for the person to return to work safely, options may include staying on furlough.

[Find out more about working safely during coronavirus.](#)

For the latest government advice on shielding:

- in England, see [shielding guidance on GOV.UK](#)
- in Scotland, see the [Scottish Government's shielding guidance](#)
- in Wales, see the [Welsh Government's shielding guidance](#)

If someone's doctor advises them to continue shielding

Some people in England and Scotland may be advised by their doctor to carry on shielding after 1 August.

An employee or worker affected by this should get a letter from their doctor to explain that they need to continue shielding. They should share this with their employer. The employer should talk with the person to understand the issue and see how they can support them.

Discrimination and unfair treatment

If an employee or worker is still being asked to go out to work and they believe they're at risk because they're in one of the vulnerable groups, it's important they talk to their employer.

If they do not feel safe returning to work because their employer has not taken measures to make the workplace safe, they should talk to their employer about it. Or they can talk to their trade union representative or health and safety representative, if they have one.

[Find out about how to raise a problem at work.](#)

Unfair treatment and dismissal

An employee or worker is protected by law against unfair treatment and dismissal, if it's because of:

- pregnancy
- age
- a health condition that's considered a disability under the Equality Act

It does not matter how long they've worked for the employer.

It could be unlawful discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, disability or age if an employer either:

- unreasonably tries to pressure someone to go to work
- unreasonably disciplines someone for not going to work

[Find out about dealing with a workplace problem.](#)