Coronavirus: shielding and vulnerable people

The government advises anyone who's at high risk of getting a severe illness if they catch coronavirus (COVID-19) — 'clinically vulnerable people' — to 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 advice from the Welsh government

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').

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.

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

**Changes to shielding**

Employers and employees will need to consider how any changes to shielding advice will affect them.

**England**

From 1 August 2020, shielding will be paused in England.

**Scotland**

Shielding will continue in Scotland until at least 31 July 2020.

**Wales**

Shielding is expected to continue in Wales until at least 16 August 2020.

**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.

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

**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 cannot follow guidance on social distancing at work or during travel to work, they should tell their employer they need to follow government advice and stay at home.

**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.