

IMPORTANT ADVICE SHIELDING

If you have been informed you are not in the high risk category but still wish to follow 'shielding' advice then this is a personal decision that you are, of course, free to make and to follow as far as possible.

However shielding is a severe intervention which may be difficult to adhere to for such a long period of time. 12 weeks may only be an initial time estimate; it may be for longer. In addition to avoiding any persons with signs of respiratory infection such as a cold, shielding includes the following:

1. Do not leave your house.
2. Do not attend any gatherings. This includes gatherings of friends and families in private spaces, for example, family homes, weddings and religious services.
3. Do not go out for shopping, leisure or travel and, when arranging food or medication deliveries, these should be left at the door to minimize contact.

Indeed, the shielding advice letter goes even further to stipulate distancing from family members you may live with, recommending if possible, the use of different rooms, especially bedrooms and bathrooms, and keeping 2 meters apart at all times.

The additional benefit gained from this extra precautionary measure needs to be weighed against any impact on your mental and physical wellbeing from a significant loss of social contact and needing to stay in the home for a long period of time.

The high risk shielded group is a small subset of vulnerable patients that have been selected by NHS England in conjunction with hospital consultant, using a strict set of criteria.

Government advice is that people who are not included in the high-risk shielding group, fall under the following 2 further divisions:

Low risk category for developing complications from COVID-19 infection – advised to follow the National Guidance on normal social distancing.

Moderate risk category for developing complications from COVID-19 infection- This is a vulnerable group (sometimes referred to as the 'flu group') and include the following conditions:

- Aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- Under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (i.e. for adults this usually anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
- Chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive
- Pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
- Chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- Chronic kidney disease
- Chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- Chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease
- Multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
- Diabetes
- Problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed
- A weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- Being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above)
- Those who are pregnant

The moderate risk category (vulnerable group) are advised to be more strict with regard to social distancing so as to minimise potential exposure to COVID19, but do not have to shield.

Social distancing measures that you are recommended are steps you can take to reduce social interaction between people. This will help reduce the transmission of coronavirus.

They are to:

1. Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough
2. Avoid non-essential use of public transport when possible
3. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to employer guidance for more information
4. Avoid large and small gatherings in public spaces, noting that pubs, restaurants, leisure centres and similar venues are currently shut as infections spread easily in closed spaces where people gather together.
5. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media
6. Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services

Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is practicable.

In addition to the general advice above, the Vulnerable Group are strongly advised to strictly follow the above measures as much as you can and to significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible.

This advice is likely to be in place for some weeks

Note: the Government's nationally coordinated food and medicines delivery service is only available to those in the shielding group.

Further guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK can be found on the Gov.Uk website. (NB: Being in the Vulnerable group is not regarded as an illness and as such a sick note cannot be used for this. It is up to any employer to undertake a risk assessment and act accordingly. This letter can, if necessary, be used as proof that you are regarded as vulnerable)

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>