

Guidance for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) **– stakeholder Q&A**

For internal use, please do not publish.

Summary

- Shielding advice is being paused nationally from 31 March.
- From 1 April, Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) individuals are no longer advised to shield but must continue to follow the rules in place for everyone under the current national restrictions.
- The government has published 'COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021', which sets out the roadmap out of the current lockdown in England. This explains how restrictions will be eased over time.
- In addition to these rules that everyone must follow, we are also advising clinically extremely vulnerable people to continue to take extra precautions to protect themselves.

Pausing of shielding

1. Why is shielding being paused? What is the evidence base for this decision?

- The decision to pause shielding has been taken based upon the latest scientific data and on the recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer.
- Since the national restrictions and shielding measures were introduced in January, cases of COVID-19 have fallen considerably across all parts of the country. Prevalence rates are now low enough that the Government can relax shielding advice.
- In addition, the majority of CEV people have now received their first dose of the vaccine. Whilst no vaccine can be 100% effective, this means CEV people are in general better protected against the virus.

2. Will the Government be writing to clinically extremely vulnerable people?

- Yes, the Government will write to everyone on the Shielded Patient List in England advising them of these changes. Emails are also being sent where CEV individuals have registered their email address with their GP. The letters will be available online [here](#) and the [main guidance page](#) will be updated from 1 April.
- Accessible versions of the letter will be produced as soon as possible and made available on GOV.UK.

3. Will CEVs need to shield again in the future? How will those decisions be taken?

- In the future, the Government will only reintroduce formal shielding advice in the very worst affected areas and for a limited period of time. This will be based on a recommendation from the Chief Medical Officer.
- The Government will write to you separately to inform you if you are advised to shield. You are not advised to follow formal shielding advice again unless you receive a new shielding letter advising you to do so.

4. I haven't had my second dose yet / I have not yet had my vaccine – is it ok for me to stop shielding?
- The decision to pause shielding has primarily been taken based upon prevalence rates. The prevalence of the virus in the community is now low enough that the Government can relax shielding advice.
 - We would still encourage everyone to take up the vaccine when they are offered it. If you have received your first dose, it is important you take up the second dose when offered as this should increase your level of protection.

CEV guidance

5. What is the guidance for CEVs post 31 March?
- CEVs are no longer advised to shield from 1 April 2021.
 - They should still work from home if they can, but if that is not possible, they can return to the workplace.
 - CEVs are advised that if they do go out to the shops or pharmacy, they should consider going at quieter times of the day.
 - Children and young people on the SPL are advised they should return to school or college.
 - People on the SPL should continue to take extra precautions set out in the guidance. This is set out in the letter we are issuing to people on the SPL, and from 1 April will also be available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>
6. If CEVs have received their vaccine, do they still need to follow CEV guidance after 31 March?
- Yes. Even if a CEV individual has had both doses of a vaccine, there is still no guarantee that they will not become ill from COVID-19 if they catch the virus. Therefore, they should continue to follow the extra precautions set out by the Government, to help reduce their likelihood of infection.
 - The guidance to CEVs is only advisory. It is not mandatory that they follow this advice, although they should be aware that not doing so may increase their risk of catching COVID-19.
 - Everyone must continue to follow the regulations in place at each stage of the roadmap.
7. Will CEV households be prioritised for the vaccine? Why not?
- CEV households are not prioritised for a vaccine in phase 1.
 - Many individuals who are clinically extremely vulnerable will have some degree of immunosuppression or be immunocompromised and may not respond as well to the vaccine. Therefore, those who are clinically extremely vulnerable should continue to follow government advice on reducing their risk of infection. Consideration has been given to vaccination of household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals. However, at this time there is no data on the size of the effect of COVID-19 vaccines on transmission. Evidence is expected to accrue during the course of the vaccine

programme, and until that time the committee is not in a position to advise vaccination solely on the basis of indirect protection.

- **Carers:** Those who are eligible for a carer's allowance, or those who are the sole or primary carer of an elderly or disabled person who is at increased risk of COVID-19 mortality and therefore clinically vulnerable will be prioritised for a vaccine in cohort 6, alongside individuals with certain underlying health conditions.

8. What about those individuals recently added to the SPL through the QCovid model?

- Individuals recently added to the SPL as result of the population risk assessment should follow the same advice as provided to the clinically extremely vulnerable.
- Shielding advice is being paused from 31 March, they will therefore no longer be advised to shielding but must continue to follow the rules in place for everyone under the current national restrictions.
- Individuals are advised to continue to take extra precautions to protect themselves, these include working from home as much as possible and shopping at quieter times.

Shielded Patients List

9. Will individuals' names be kept on the Shielded Patient List?

- The NHS will continue to maintain the Shielded Patient List.
- This allows the Government to maintain targeted advice and support to those who are most vulnerable and to change advice and support if necessary.

10. Should GPs and clinicians continue to add and remove patients from the Shielded Patient List as required?

- Yes. The Shielded Patient List will continue to be maintained and GPs and clinicians should add or remove individuals as appropriate.

Support

11. Where can CEVs go for help after the shielding support offer finishes?

- Councils will continue to support those in their communities in need and have systems and relationships in place with other organisations to provide that.
- Councils will be able to provide ad hoc discretionary support to those that need it from existing COMF funding. They should use their judgement in assessing eligibility for further support, ensuring individuals are supported to be as self-sufficient as possible.
- The NHS Volunteer Responders Programme will continue providing support with food, prescriptions and essential items to those who are self-isolating for any reason. This also includes anyone that is clinically extremely vulnerable, or anyone that is vulnerable for another reason.
- CEVs can contact NHSVR on 0808 196 3646 and ask for help. More information is available here: <https://volunteering.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/nhs-volunteer-responders-portal/isolating>

12. Will CEVs keep priority access to a supermarket delivery slots after the 31 March?

- All major supermarkets have committed to continuing priority access to supermarket delivery slots until 21 June (step 4 of the roadmap) for those clinically extremely vulnerable individuals who have already signed up for support. Some supermarkets may choose to extend their offer beyond 21 June but will be in touch to explain the terms of any offer. Even where supermarkets end priority access on 21 June, individuals can continue to book deliveries from a supermarket.
- CEVs without friends, family, or other support networks to rely on can continue to register to request priority access to a supermarket delivery slot up until **31 March** via the Shielding Support website, www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support. CEVs will not be able to register using this website after midnight on the 31 March.

13. Can CEVs now safely leave their homes to go shopping for food or medicines?

- Whilst CEVs are not advised to avoid going to the shops, individuals may wish to continue using online delivery for food and essential shopping, or to rely on family and friends. If they do go out to the shops or pharmacy, CEVs should consider going at quieter times of the day. Individuals must wear face coverings in all shops unless they are exempt.

14. Will the medicine delivery service end after 31 March?

- Those supported by the Medicines Delivery Service will continue to receive this support until the end of March.
- After this date, if it is not possible for someone to attend their pharmacy, and friends and family are not able to collect medicine for them, then the NHS Volunteer Responders will continue to offer medicines deliveries. If someone is vulnerable or at risk and needs help with shopping, medication or other essential supplies, they should call 0808 196 3646 (8 am to 8pm).

Employment and welfare

15. Can CEVs go back to work if they cannot work from home?

- Everyone is currently advised to work from home where possible. If individuals cannot work from home, they can still go to work.
- Employers are required to take steps to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace and should be able to explain to the measures they have put in place to keep people safe at work. Employers and CEV employees should have a conversation as early as possible about their return to work.
- Where employers are not managing the risk of COVID-19, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and local authorities will take action which can range from the provision of specific advice, issuing enforcement notices, stopping certain work practices until they are made safe and, where businesses fail to comply with enforcement notices, this could lead to prosecution.

16. How should employers be supporting CEVs to come back to work?

- Employers are required to take steps to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace and should be able to explain the measures they have put in place to keep people safe at work.
- Workplace specific safer working guides set out how different workplaces should be made COVID-secure, including how to maintain social distancing and a system of risk management in the workplace: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.
- The Health and Safety Executive also provides information to employers on making workplaces COVID-secure and on protecting vulnerable workers: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/protect-people.htm>
- The Government is asking employers to work with us to ease the transition back to a more normal way of life for their CEV employees. It is important that this group continue to take careful precautions, and employers should do all they can to enable them to work from home where this is possible, including moving them to another role if required.
- Where working from home is not possible, those who have been shielding should be provided with the safest onsite roles that enable them to maintain social distancing from others.
- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) has been extended until 30 September and CEVs remain eligible for this even whilst shielding guidance is not in place.
- CEV employees and their employers should have conversations as early as possible about their return to work, and on how best to support them to manage their risk and work safely. The Health and Safety Executive has published resources to support employers in having conversations about preventing the spread of coronavirus in the workplace with their employees: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/talking-to-your-workers/index.htm>. This includes specific information and guidance for employers on stress, wellbeing and providing mental health support.

17. Do CEVs have to go back to work even if they don't feel safe to? What are their rights?

- Employers are required to take steps to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace and should be able to explain the measures they have put in place to keep people safe at work.
- If CEVs have concerns about their health and safety at work they can raise them with their workplace union, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) <https://web.archive.org/web/20201018050420/https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm> or their local council.
- Where some employers are not managing the risk of coronavirus, HSE and local authorities will take action which can range from the provision of specific advice, issuing enforcement notices, stopping certain work practices until they are made safe and, where businesses fail to comply with enforcement notices, this could lead to prosecution.
- The existing employment rights framework also provides protections against discrimination, unfair dismissal and detriment. Further information for employers and workers on work absences due to coronavirus (COVID-19) can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/if-you-need-to-self-isolate-or-cannot-attend-work-due-to-coronavirus>.
- The Citizens Advice Bureau also has information about workers' rights and how to solve problems in the workplace: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/>.

17 March 2021

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

18. What about if CEVs are concerned about their risk during their journey to work (e.g. they have to use public transport)?

- The Department for Transport (DfT) has worked with the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), Public Health England (PHE) and the Department for Business Enterprise and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to develop Safer Guidance for Transport Operators in order to protect transport workers and passengers: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-transport-guidance-for-operators#social-contact>
- Operators are also ensuring they implement the Safe Workplace guidance. These actions ensure that operators are keeping their workers and passengers safe.
- DfT has also consulted industry stakeholders and trade unions throughout the pandemic in order to ensure best practice approaches are followed and the transport sector operates safely.
- Since the start of the pandemic, the public has been advised to follow mitigations, introducing requirements for mandatory face coverings on all public transport
- DfT has also provided emergency support to public transport operators to ensure the continuity of essential services during pandemic. This has included express provision for measures to protect transport workers and the public including PPE, passenger spacing, screens, barriers, additional cleaning services.

19. What financial/employment support is available for CEVs at this time?

- The **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough)** has been extended until 30 September. CEV employees can be furloughed throughout this period, provided their employer agrees. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>.
- For self-employed CEVs, the **Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)** has also been extended until September: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/self-employment-income-support-scheme-grant-extension>
- CEVs who need support to work at home or in the workplace may be able to apply for **Access to Work**, which provides support for the disability-related extra costs of working that are beyond standard reasonable adjustments an employer must provide: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>
- There is a wide range of support available for people who are affected by coronavirus or its effect on the economy, including **Universal Credit (UC)**, which is available to people who are in and out of work, including those who are on furlough. The £20 per week increase to UC will remain in place until September. More information about employment and benefits support can be found here: <https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/>
- The **Health and Safety Executive** has published resources to support employers and employees in having conversations about preventing the spread of coronavirus in the workplace: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/talking-to-your-workers/index.htm>

17 March 2021

- The **Citizens Advice Bureau** has information about workers' rights and how to solve problems in the workplace: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/>. Employees can also get advice on their specific situation and their employment rights by visiting the **Acas** website <https://www.acas.org.uk/contact> or calling the Acas helpline on 0300 123 1100.

20. Are CEVs still eligible for SSP and ESA?

- Where CEV individuals are no longer required to shield, and they are unable to work from home but can work on site, they should do so. Shielding guidance must be in place in order for employees to be eligible for SSP on the basis of shielding.
- Employees will remain eligible for SSP if they are unable to work and are sick, or required to self-isolate, provided they meet all eligibility conditions.
- People who are unable to work due to their health condition or disability will remain eligible for ESA provided they meet the eligibility conditions (ESA as per business as normal).

21. Will CEVs be told to shield again in future and what support will be available for them to protect their job/income?

- Guidance around shielding will be continually reviewed and informed by the latest scientific evidence and advice. The Government will continue to assess the support in place should advice to shield be reinstated.
- Where home working is not possible, employers will be able to access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough) until 30th September 2021.
- For those who have not been furloughed, CEV employees who are notified to shield again should again be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) for the period they are advised to shield themselves, if all other SSP or ESA eligibility conditions are met.

Education

22. Can CEV children and young people go back to school/college/university now that shielding has been paused?

- From 1 April, clinically extremely vulnerable pupils and students should return to their school or other educational setting now that shielding has been paused.
- Higher education students who are on practical or practice-based courses began to attend from 8 March, as well as those who were on specific courses who returned in January.

23. Is it safe for CEV students to attend education settings?

- As our knowledge of COVID-19 has grown, we now know that very few children and young people are at highest risk of severe illness due to the virus.
- Education settings have implemented a range of protective measures recommended by the Public Health England (PHE) endorsed in [guidance](#) published by Department for Education (DfE) which, when followed, creates an inherently safer environment for pupils, staff and families.

17 March 2021

- Where parents are anxious about their child's attendance, they should speak to their child's school or college about their concerns and discuss the protective measures that have been put in place to reduce the risk. They should also discuss other measures that can be put in place to ensure that their children can regularly attend school or college.

24. What measures will be put in place by schools and colleges to allow them to return?

- Rapid testing using Lateral Flow Devices (LFD)s will support the return to face-to-face education by helping to identify people who are infectious but do not have any coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms. Lateral flow tests can also be picked up directly for households, childcare and support bubbles of primary and secondary school pupils and for households, childcare and support bubbles of primary and secondary school staff.
- To support the return of face-to-face education rapid lateral flow devices are being made available to schools. In addition to testing, secondary schools and colleges are continuing to put in place [a range of protective measures](#) to help children minimise their risk of infection by and transmission of Covid-19. These include social distancing, handwashing, face coverings where needed, bubbles, enhanced cleaning and ventilation and managing confirmed cases. Implementing the system of controls outlined in DfE guidance, creates a safer environment for students and staff where the risk of transmission of infection is substantially reduced.

Access to health, care, and mental health support

25. What if CEVs require additional care and support?

- It is important that all individuals continue to receive the care and support they need to help stay safe and well. Providers of social care and medical services are making every effort to ensure services remain open and as safe as possible.
- Individuals should continue to seek support from the NHS for existing health conditions. A range of NHS services can be accessed from home, including ordering repeat prescriptions, or contacting health professional through an online consultation. To find out more visit www.nhs.uk/health-at-home or download the NHS App.

26. What mental health support is available to help CEVs manage this transition?

- The mental health and wellbeing of everyone is absolutely critical in these unprecedented times.
- DHSC published their Wellbeing and Mental Health Support Plan for COVID-19 in November 2020, which sets out the support being made available for people in the context of a second wave and the winter months.
- Community mental health services will ensure proactive outreach and review for the most vulnerable. In line with the guidance on supporting mental health providers to care for patients who have been advised to shield, providers should identify people deemed to be vulnerable who are in receipt of or have received care from their service, proactively contact these people, and optimise their care through reviewing and amending care plans as necessary.

17 March 2021

- All mental health providers, including providers of psychological therapies, have been issued with guidance to encourage them to deliver care remotely so that vulnerable groups can receive care safely.
- Talking therapies will continue to be made available remotely so people can access help safely from home, whilst the NHS works to ensure that face to face support is available for those with the most serious mental health illnesses.
- Mental health trusts in England have been instructed to put in place 24/7 crisis lines for all ages so people can get urgent help whenever they need it. A national service finder for local urgent mental health telephone lines is available on the NHS.UK website.

27. What help is available to support young people's mental health and wellbeing?

- The Government has recently announced a £79 million boost to children and young people's mental health support, including through Mental Health Support Teams.
- The Government has invested £8m in training and support for educational staff, delivered through Local Authorities and is helping colleges to better support students' mental health with the £5.4m College Collaboration Fund.
- The newly established Mental Health Action Group will continue to look at the support available across education settings to help staff, students, and pupils in their return to school, college and university. Dr Alex George, the newly appointed Youth Mental Health Ambassador, will be part of this Action Group, to advise government and raise the profile of mental health education and wellbeing in schools, colleges and universities.
- The £1bn Covid catch-up package will support educational settings to put the right pastoral support in place and fund activities focused on mental wellbeing, re-engagement and behaviour.
- In addition, the Government has provided over £10m funding to mental health charities to help them adapt, expand and reach those who are most vulnerable. For those who need support outside of school and college, all NHS Mental Health Trusts have provided 24/7 telephone lines to support people of all ages.

28. How can I stay physically healthy?

- We encourage you to go outside for exercise. You may wish to meet up with one other person from outside your household or support bubble outdoors, for example to exercise in an outdoor public place, but we suggest that you always try to do so as safely as possible.
- You can find tips and advice on staying active and eating healthily here: <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/>
- It is also important that you attend any health appointments and continue to access the services you need.

ENDS