Guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable from Coronavirus (COVID-19)

# Background and Scope of Guidance

This guidance is for people, including children, who are at very high risk of developing serious illness if they are exposed to coronavirus (COVID-19) because they have a particular serious underlying health condition (these are listed below).

It is also for their families, friends and carers.

The guidance is for use by people in their own home, or in long-term care facilities, for the elderly, or for people with special needs.

### We are strongly advising people with serious underlying health conditions, which put them at very high risk of serious illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), to follow “shielding” measures to keep them safe. We will describe these measures in detail later.

### “Shielding” means protecting those people who are extremely vulnerable to the serious complications of coronavirus because they have a particular existing health condition. It involves staying at home for at least 12 weeks, and reducing contact with other people as far as possible to reduce the risk of being exposed to coronavirus.

# What do we mean by extremely vulnerable?

**People in this group include:**

1. Solid organ transplant recipients
2. People with specific cancers
* People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
* People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
* People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
* People having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.
* People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last six months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.
1. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).
2. People with severe single organ disease (e.g. Liver, Cardio, Renal, Neurological).
3. People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as Severe Combined Immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell).
4. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
5. People who are pregnant and children up to the age of 18 with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

Shielding is for your protection. We strongly advise you to follow this guidance but it is your decision to make. This will be a deeply personal decision and we would advise you to speak to your family and friends about this, and with your healthcare professionals, if necessary.

You will receive a letter from the Welsh Government setting out the advice and sources of help and support in your local community. If you are employed, this is also proof that you will not be able to go to work while you are shielding and can be shared with your employer. If you are able to, you can work from home, if your job allows it. You will not need to get a fit note from your GP.

If you need help from the welfare system visit <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit> .

If you believe you fall into one of the categories of extremely vulnerable people listed above and you have not received a letter, you should discuss your concerns with your GP or hospital clinician.

We understand this is an anxious time and people considered extremely vulnerable will understandably have questions and concerns. Plans are being put into place to make sure you have a wide range of help and support.

# What you need to know

If you have an underlying health condition listed above, you are at very high risk of serious illness requiring hospital treatment if you catch coronavirus (COVID-19).

Shielding is used to protect people who are considered to be extremely vulnerable from being exposed to the virus.

You are strongly advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact for at least 12 weeks from the day you receive your letter. We will let you know if this changes.

Visits from carers or healthcare workers, who would normally come and help with your daily needs or social care, will be able to carry on as normal. But carers and care workers must stay away if they have any of the symptoms of coronavirus – a high temperature (above 37.8 °C) and/or new and continuous cough.

You may find this guidance on home care provision (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance/covid-19-guidance-on-home-care-provision>) useful.

Everyone coming into your home must wash their hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds on arrival to your house, and frequently while they are in your home.

It will be a good idea to write a list of people – friends, family or a support network in your local community – who can help with your care if your main carer becomes unwell. You can also contact your local authority for advice and support (contact details are available in the letter).

If you think you have developed symptoms of COVID-19 – a high temperature (above 37.8 °C) and/or new and continuous cough seek clinical advice using the online coronavirus service ( <https://gov.wales/check-if-you-need-coronavirus-medical-help>) or, if you do not have access to the internet, call 111. **Do this as soon as you get symptoms.**

If you live with someone, they do not need to practice the shielding measures but they do need to take extra steps to help protect you – it is very important they follow the current guidance about social distancing and reduce their contact with other people outside the home to reduce the risk of you being exposed to the virus.

If you are caring for someone who is extremely vulnerable, you must follow the guidance on social distancing (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-social-distancing-guidance>).

## **What do I do if I have been told to take “shielding” measures?**

Shielding will help to protect people who are extremely vulnerable people by reducing their contact with other people, and the risk of being exposed to coronavirus.

In practice, it means people who are extremely vulnerable should not leave their homes. Inside their homes, if they live with others, they should reduce all non-essential contact with other members of their household.

You are strongly advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact for at least 12 weeks from the day you receive your letter.

The actions are:

1. Avoid any contact with anyone showing symptoms of coronavirus (these include a high temperature (above 37.8 °C) and/or new and continuous cough);
2. Stay at home for the next 12 weeks;
3. Stay away from gatherings of people, even friends and family in their homes; from weddings, other celebrations and religious services;
4. Arrange for food and medication to be delivered to your home;
5. Keep in touch with other people using remote technology such as the phone, internet, and social media;
6. Use phone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services;
7. Regularly wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, and make sure all carers or support workers who visit your home do the same.

 **We know shielding will be difficult.**

**You should try to find ways of staying in touch with friends and family and taking part in your normal activities over the phone or the internet. Please do not take part in activities if they involve any face-to-face contact with other people inside or outside your home**.

 **This advice will be in place for at least 12 weeks from the day you receive your letter.**

# What should you do if you live with someone?

The rest of your household will not need to undertake these protective shielding measures if they do not have an underlying health condition (as listed earlier). But they will be there to support you, and they must follow guidance on social distancing (<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-social-distancing-guidance>).

* Minimise the time you spend with others in shared spaces such as the kitchen, bathroom and sitting area, and keep the rooms you share well ventilated
* Aim to keep two metres (three steps) away from others, and sleep in a separate bed where possible
* Use separate towels and bathrooms. If you share a bathroom, clean it after every use. Consider creating a rota for bathing, with you using the facilities first.
* Avoid using the kitchen at the same time as others, and eat your meals in separate rooms. Ensure all kitchenware is cleaned thoroughly.

We know it will be difficult for some people to lead separate lives. Please follow this guidance and everyone must regularly wash their hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, avoid touching their face, and clean frequently touched surfaces.

If the rest of your household follows the advice on social distancing and minimise the risk of spreading the virus within the home by following the advice above, there is no need for them to also follow the shielding measure alongside you.

# Good hygiene

Here are some simple guidelines to follow to help prevent the spread of airway and chest infections, including:

* Wash your hands more often - with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, or use a hand sanitiser. Do this after you blow your nose, sneeze or cough, and before after you eat or handle food
* Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
* Avoid close contact with people who have symptoms
* Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin,
* Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home.

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# What should you do if you develop possible symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19 (high temperature above 37.8 °C and/or new and continuous cough), seek clinical advice using the online coronavirus service ( <https://gov.wales/check-if-you-need-coronavirus-medical-help>) or, if you do not have access to the internet, call 111.

In an emergency, call 999 if you are seriously ill. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre, or a hospital.

To help the NHS provide you with the best care if you need to go to hospital as a result of catching coronavirus, please prepare a single hospital bag. This should include your emergency contact, a list of the medications you take (including dose and frequency), any information on your planned care appointments and things you would need for an overnight stay (snacks, pyjamas, toothbrush, your medication etc). If you have an advanced care plan, please include that.

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# How can you get assistance with foods and medicines if you are shielding?

Ask family, friends and neighbours to support you, and use online services wherever possible. If this is not possible, contact your local authority for support (contact details are included in your letter).

If your prescription is not currently collected or delivered, you can arrange this by:

1. Asking someone to pick up your prescription from the local pharmacy, (this is the best option, if possible).
2. Contact your pharmacy to ask them to deliver to you, or to find a volunteer (who will have been ID checked) to deliver it to you.

You may also need to arrange any specialist medication prescribed to you by your hospital care team to be collected or delivered to you.

If you receive support from health and social care organisations, for example, if you have care provided by your local authority, this will continue as normal. Your health or social care provider will be asked to take additional precautions to make sure you are protected. The advice for formal carers is included in the home care provision guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance/covid-19-guidance-on-home-care-provision>).

# What should you do if you have hospital and GP appointments during this period?We are advising everyone to access appointments over the phone or internet, wherever possible. However, if you have a scheduled hospital or other medical appointment, talk to your GP or doctor to ensure you continue to receive the care you need. It is possible that your hospital may need to cancel or postpone some clinics and appointments.

# What is the advice for visitors, including those who are providing care for you?

You should contact regular visitors to your home, such as friends and family to let them know that you are shielding and **they should not visit you during this time**, unless they are providing essential care for you. Essential care includes things like help with washing, dressing, or feeding.

If you receive regular health or social care from an organisation, either through your local authority or paid for by yourself, inform your care providers that you are shielding, and agree a plan for continuing your care.

If you receive essential care from friends or family members, speak to your carers about extra precautions they can take to keep you safe. You may find this guidance on useful.

It is a good idea to speak to your carers about what happens if one of them becomes unwell, and consider a back-up plan. If you don’t have friends or family who can help you, there are local community groups who may be able to help. If you can’t access a local community group, you can contact your local authority for advice – contact details for each local authority are included in the letter.

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**What is the advice for informal carers who provide care for someone who is extremely vulnerable?**

If you are caring for someone who is extremely vulnerable, there are some simple steps that you can take to protect them and reduce their risk of being exposed to coronavirus:

* Only care that is **essential** should be provided.
* Wash your hands on arrival at their home and often whilst there, using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, or use hand sanitiser.
* Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze.
* Put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards.
* Do not visit or provide care if you are unwell, but make alternative arrangements for their care.
* Provide information on who they should call if they feel unwell, how to use the online coronavirus service ( <https://gov.wales/check-if-you-need-coronavirus-medical-help>), and leave the 111 number prominently displayed.
* Find out about different sources of support that could be used and access further advice on creating a contingency plan which is available from Carers UK (https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/coronavirus-covid-19).
* Look after your own well-being and physical health during this time. Further information on this is available further below.

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# How do you look after your mental wellbeing

Shielding and distancing can be both boring and frustrating. You may find your mood and feelings are affected and you may feel low, worried, or have problems sleeping, and you might miss being outside and among other people.

At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour which in turn can make you feel worse. There are simple things you can do that may help to stay mentally, and physically, active during this time, such as:

* Look for ideas of exercises you can do at home on the [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/)
* Spend time doing things you enjoy – this might include reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to/watching favourite radio or TV programmes.
* Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise regularly, and try to avoid smoking, alcohol and recreational drugs.
* Try spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air, arranging space to sit and see a nice view (if possible) and get some natural sunlight, or get out into any private space, keeping at least two metres away from your neighbours and household members if you are sitting on your doorstep.

Constantly watching the news can make you feel more worried. If you think it is affecting you, try to limit the time you spend watching, reading, or listening to media coverage of the outbreak. It may help to only check the news at set times or limiting this to a couple of times a day.

If you are receiving services for your mental health, learning disability or autism and are worried about the impact of isolation, please contact your keyworker/care coordinator or provider to review your care plan. If you have additional needs please contact your key worker or care coordinator to develop a safety or crisis plan.

There are also services to support you and others you might be worried about. Talking about worries and problems can make things easier.

The C.A.L.L. Helpline is a dedicated mental health helpline for Wales. It provides confidential listening and emotional support and can help you contact support in your local area, including voluntary and charitable organisations. It is available on 0800 132 737, or by texting ‘help’ to 81066.  Alternatively visit the C.A.L.L. website ( <http://callhelpline.org.uk/>)

If you are still struggling after several weeks and it is affecting your daily life, please contact NHS Direct Wales (<https://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/>) or call 111.

# What steps can you take to stay connected with family and friends during this time?

Draw on support from friends, family and other support networks. Try to stay in touch with those around you over the phone, by post, or online. Let people know how you would like to stay in touch and build that into your routine. This is also important in looking after your mental wellbeing and you may find it helpful to talk to them about how you are feeling, if you want to.

Remember, it is ok to share your concerns with others you trust, and in doing so you may end up providing support to them too. You may also want to contact the C.A.L.L. helpline on 0800 132 737, or by texting ‘help’ to 81066.  Alternatively visit the C.A.L.L. website ( <http://callhelpline.org.uk/>)

# What is the advice for people living in long-term care facilities, either for the elderly or persons with special needs?

This advice also applies to extremely vulnerable people living in long-term care facilities.

Care providers should carefully discuss this advice with the families, carers and specialist doctors looking after residents to ensure this guidance is strictly followed.

# What is the advice for parents and schools with extremely vulnerable children?

The advice also applies to extremely vulnerable children in mainstream and special schools.