

Making decisions about keeping safe after 19 July 2021

Based on guidance issued for England

This document is based on guidance for England. The principles of assessing your own risk and the risk of different activities is the same wherever you live. If you live in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, check your national guidance and advice for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable – see links below.

Just over 2 million people in England were advised earlier this year that they needed to shield because they are extremely vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus. Shielding was paused when infection rates fell significantly making it safer to go out into your local community. Some people who were not considered extremely vulnerable have weakened immune systems and may still be at higher risk after vaccination.

Many people who are clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) now have to make decisions about how to keep safe after 19 July when the majority of infection control measures are eased. COVID-19 is still a very new virus so there are a lot of things that we just don't yet know. This uncertainty can make it hard to make decisions. There are no perfect solutions. Be careful of restricting your life so much that your health suffers in other ways.

The risk of coming into contact with someone who is infectious is higher when the virus is more prevalent, so as rates go up you may wish to be more careful and as they come down you can be a bit more relaxed.

Your personal risk

Not everyone who is clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) faces the same level of risk. Some of those who were shielding and became ill with the virus have recovered. Your level of risk will depend on why you were considered CEV, but also factors such as your age. Many people with inflammatory or autoimmune conditions are CEV because of medication they take, not because their condition itself makes them at higher risk.

Vaccination

Vaccination can dramatically reduce your risk of contracting COVID-19, and of being seriously ill. Some people who are immunosuppressed, for instance because of the medication they take, may not get as much protection from the vaccine. On average it seems that overall immunosuppressed people get very little protection from the first dose but have a strong level of protection two weeks after the second dose, so make sure you have had both doses and take up any booster jabs offered in future. The vaccine is so new that it isn't clear who is well protected by the vaccine and who might be less well protected.

Even if you take an antibody test, no-one yet knows what a good antibody response would be or how to tell how much protection you might have, based on your antibody levels.

You may feel that you understand your own level of risk and are happy to make decisions about your daily activities based on that information. If not, and you are finding it hard to make decisions about how to stay safe, you might want to speak to your specialist doctor or nurse about this.

The cost of keeping safe

Extreme isolation may keep you safer from COVID-19 but it is also harmful to your physical and mental health. If you do become ill (with COVID-19 or anything else) you are likely to do much better if you have been eating healthy food and staying active.

Some people enjoy connecting with others online and over video and find it easier not to see people in person very often. Others, especially people who live alone, feel very isolated if they can't spend time with people face to face. Loneliness is very damaging to your health. Think about ways to meet up with others more safely, rather than become isolated.

What activity is safer

When deciding what activity you want to do, the risk of contracting COVID-19 is lower if you:

- Have had both doses of the vaccine, and received the second dose at least 14 days ago.
- You meet with people who have also had both doses of the vaccine, and received the second dose at least 14 days ago.
- Stay in the open air - outdoors is safer than indoors.
- Indoors is safer if it is well ventilated, not crowded, and people are wearing face coverings.
- The fewer people you come into contact with the less likely you are to contract the virus. One or two close friends might be better than a big social network.
- You continue to keep your distance and don't hug friends.
- People you meet have taken a lateral flow test (LFT) before meeting you and the result is negative. LFT are now freely available in pharmacies, community centres or [order on line](#).
- Some masks will offer you more protection, e.g. FFP2 masks (provided they are worn correctly and fit around your face). They are more expensive, but this may be worth it at times when you can't avoid crowded indoor places.
- Take your own hand sanitiser when leaving the house and use it often.

Meeting friends and family

If you are meeting someone talk to them about your concerns and what you need in order to be safe, and make sure that they understand why this is important. You might want to ask them to take a LFT before they come to meet you, ask them to wear a face covering even if that's not required, explain that you want to keep your distance and not hug, meet outside or open windows and doors even if it is cold. You can explain that these are all things suggested by the government guidance and will lower your risk of becoming ill from COVID-19. A recent survey showed that most people are not aware that not everyone gets the same benefit from the COVID-19 vaccine, so you may need to explain this.

Work

From 19 July social distancing and face coverings will not be required by law in work spaces. Employers are also no longer instructed to ask people to work from home if possible. However, employers are still under a legal duty to keep their employees safe and the guidance lists a series of steps employers can take to keep employee safe. You should explain to your employer that you are extremely vulnerable to the virus, even if you have received both doses of the vaccine, and discuss what else could be done to keep you safe, such as changing role or traveling in at less busy times. [The guidance](#) for most work settings talks about groups who are at higher risk of severe illness. It says that employers should continue to support these workers by discussing with them their individual needs and supporting them in taking any additional precautions advised by their clinicians. (You will find this in the section headed “who should go to work”).

Many employers are being very supportive of people who are more vulnerable to the virus. However, we know that some are less supportive. If you feel, after talking to your employer, that it may not be safe for you to continue in work it is important that you check your understanding of the level of risk you face. Many people who are shielding because of inflammatory or autoimmune medication are at a much lower level of risk than others on the clinically extremely vulnerable list. If you still have concerns about your health and safety at work you can raise them with your workplace union, the Health and Safety Executive or your local authority.

The [Access to Work](#) scheme may be able to fund extra travel costs if you can't use public transport to get to work. They may also fund other support such as costs of working from home or extra PPE. Currently the Access to Work scheme is prioritising applications from clinically extremely vulnerable group to try to make sure these people receive support as quickly as possible.

Children and young people

The vast majority of children who were initially advised to shield were later advised that they did not need to do so. There is no evidence that children and young people (including those taking immune modifying or immune suppressing medications) are more likely to be infected with Covid-19. If children and young people with rheumatological or inflammatory ophthalmic conditions do become infected with COVID-19, there is no evidence that they will become more unwell compared with children and young people without these conditions. If you are unsure about your child/young person's risk, please talk to their healthcare team and the latest information will always be available here on the RCPCH (Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health) website:

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-guidance-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-children-young-people#children-who-are-clinically-extremely-vulnerable>

CCAA has additional advice and some support resources for children living with arthritis, which you can access here: <https://www.ccaa.org.uk/coronavirus-support-resources/>

If you as a parent or carer are clinically vulnerable, you may need to talk to your child about any fears or concerns for your health that they may have. Young Minds have some useful resources for parents/carers which you can access here: <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents>

Travel

Although the requirement to wear face coverings on public transport will be lifted on July 19th, the government still encourage people to wear them at busy times. The guidance for people who are clinically vulnerable does not make any specific recommendations about travel. You might want to think about travelling at quieter times where possible and finding out if people are continuing to wear face coverings on your regular service. In London, face coverings will still be required on all TFL services (tube, bus, tram and some trains). Other transport providers may do the same. You might want to consider using a mask that gives you more protection such as an FFP2.

Walking and cycling reduce the chances of you being close to someone with the virus. Using a car will bring you into contact with fewer people than public transport.

Shopping

Face coverings are no longer required in shops, but government guidance is to wear them in confined spaces. Some shops are actively encouraging wearing face coverings. You might want to find out if there are shops where more customers are wearing face coverings. Think about where you shop and at what time of day. Try to shop at quieter times and use shops which are still encouraging or implementing covid safety measures. You might want to reduce the number of shopping trips or use online shopping where you can. You might want to ask friends, family or volunteers to do your shopping for you. The

NHS Volunteer Responders programme is still available to help support those who need it. Call them free on 0808 196 3646 between 8am and 8pm, 7 days a week to self-refer or visit [NHS Volunteer Responders](#) for further information. There may also be other local authority, voluntary or community services in your local area that you can access for support.

Accessing healthcare

Although the legal requirement for face coverings is lifted, Public Health England guidance requiring mask wearing in clinical areas is still in force, meaning people will be required to wear masks in hospitals and GP practices. Many healthcare settings will also continue with some or all of the other measures they were using before 19 July. If you are worried, talk to your healthcare professional about how they can help to keep you safe while accessing support, but do not avoid vital healthcare and treatment.

Guidance for people clinically extremely vulnerable

England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Wales: <https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html>

Scotland: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-shielding>

Northern Ireland: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-and-vulnerable-people>

16 July 2021