

Guidance

# COVID-19: guidance for young people on shielding and protecting people most likely to become unwell if they catch coronavirus

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## What has changed

The government has updated its guidance for people who are shielding, taking into account that coronavirus (COVID-19) disease levels have decreased substantially over the last few weeks.

COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that can cause serious illness in some people. COVID-19 can affect many parts of the body including the lungs and therefore breathing. It can spread from person to person by coughing, or by touching surfaces or areas of skin that have been contaminated by (come into contact with) the virus. The name COVID-19 comes from coronavirus disease 2019, it was named in December 2019.

People who are shielding remain vulnerable and should continue to take extra care to protect themselves from coming into contact with COVID-19.

The advice has now changed so that people who are shielding can now choose to leave their home if they wish to spend time outdoors.

If you're shielding, you need to be careful when outdoors and must maintain strict social distancing. This means keeping 2 metres apart (3 steps) from anyone outside your household.

If you're shielding, time outdoors can be alone or with members of your own household. If you live alone, you may choose to spend time outdoors with one person from another household (keeping 2 metres apart at all times). Ideally, this should be the same person each time.

It's OK if you want to remain inside your own home because you do not feel comfortable with going into public spaces or with having any form of contact with other people who don't normally live with you. However, careful time outside in the fresh air can help clear the head and lift your mood.

An all-ages version of this [guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable](#) provides more detailed information.

You can also read [further information on schools](#) and the [workplace](#) for those living in households where people are shielding.

The government regularly reviews this guidance. If this advice changes, we will update this online. Your GP or specialist will also let you know.

## Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for all adults and young people, including those who are clinically extremely vulnerable, and those who care for someone who is. The advice applies whether you live:

- on your own
- in your family home
- in a secure children's home
- at university
- in a care home

If you have been told that you're clinically extremely vulnerable, you should:

- follow the advice in this guidance
- [register online](#) for support even if you do not need additional support right now

This guidance on shielding is advice. This means that you can decide if you want to follow it or not. You will not be breaking the law if you do not follow the advice. However, everyone must follow the [guidance on staying alert and safe \(social distancing\)](#). This includes the possibility that you (or your parents) may be fined.

## Clinically extremely vulnerable people

Some adults and young people have health conditions that mean they are more likely to become very unwell and might have to go to hospital if they catch COVID-19. These people are described as being [clinically extremely vulnerable](#) and include those who:

- have had a solid organ transplant – kidney, liver, pancreas, heart or lung
- are having treatments for some cancers
- have severe long-term lung disease including cystic fibrosis and severe asthma
- have some rare diseases that increase their risk of infection
- are on medication that compromises their immune system and so are much more likely to get infections and become seriously unwell from them
- are pregnant and have significant heart disease

Families, supporters and carers also need to take precautions to help those most likely to get very unwell from COVID-19. They should read the [full guidance](#) for more information.

## Symptoms of COVID-19

The most important symptoms of COVID-19 are the recent onset of any of the following:

- a new continuous cough, meaning coughing a lot for more than an hour or experiencing 3 or more episodes of coughing in a day
- a high temperature
- a loss of, or change in, your normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia)

If you have any of the symptoms above you must self-isolate at home and arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19. Go to [testing](#) to arrange this or contact NHS 119 via telephone if you do not have internet access.

## Staying at home and shielding for clinically extremely vulnerable people

Clinically extremely vulnerable people need to remain careful and take extra action to prevent themselves from coming into contact with the virus. This is known as 'shielding' and the easiest way to do this is by:

- staying at home
- keeping trips outside to a minimum (for instance, once per day)
- at all times, keeping 2 metres away from anyone who does not normally live with you

If you are clinically extremely vulnerable, the NHS will have sent you a letter or a text message confirming this. The letter may have been sent to your parent or guardian on your behalf.

If you have not received a letter or been contacted by your GP but you're still concerned, you should discuss your concerns with your GP or hospital doctor.

If you're shielding, the main advice is to leave your home as little as possible. You can now spend time outdoors (but not in other buildings, households or enclosed spaces). To protect yourself from coming into contact with the virus, you should not go into places like shops, schools or other people's houses.

You should keep the number of trips outside to a minimum (such as once per day).

People from outside your household must not come into your home.

Tell everyone that is not a carer or someone who provides you with essential support that they still should not visit you at home. People from outside your household must not come into your home.

You should arrange for other people to bring you the things you need and leave them outside your door. To reduce the risk of exposure even more, wash your hands after handling any deliveries.

Remember that while you can now go outside if you want to, you should still not go into any shops.

You can ask friends or family to get your medication for you. If they cannot do this, you can contact your pharmacy and ask them to deliver it. Many pharmacies already provide this service. Otherwise, you can use the [NHS App](#).

If you're having any difficulties getting the support that you need, go to [Get coronavirus support as a clinically extremely vulnerable person](#) and fill in your details for free support to be arranged for you.

Shielding is for your personal protection but it's your choice to decide whether to follow the measures we advise. We understand how hard shielding might be.

## Register for support

If you receive care or support from other people, this can still carry on while you're staying at home. You should avoid contact with anyone who is showing [symptoms of COVID-19](#).

Everyone who has received a letter advising they're clinically extremely vulnerable can register online to get free extra support. This includes arranging for essential groceries to be delivered for free to your home each week.

If you're clinically extremely vulnerable and are having difficulties getting the support that you need, register your details even if you do not need support now. There are 2 ways to register:

- [online](#). Fill in your details for free support to be arranged for you
- call 0800 028 8327

You can register even if you do not need support now.

You'll need to give your NHS number when you register. This will be at the top of the letter you've received letting you know you're clinically extremely vulnerable, or you can find it on any of your prescriptions.

## Preventing the spread of airway and chest infections

If you, or someone you're caring for, is clinically extremely vulnerable, there are some steps that you can take to reduce the risk caused by respiratory viruses.

Ensure you follow advice on good hygiene, including:

- washing your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Do this after you blow your nose, sneeze or cough, before you eat or touch food and when you return home
- sanitising your hands using an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if soap and water are not available
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- asking anyone coming into your home to wash their hands for 20 seconds using soap and water or hand sanitiser immediately after entering
- covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- putting used tissues in the bin immediately and washing your hands afterwards
- cleaning and disinfect any objects or surfaces in your home that you normally touch a lot
- avoiding any contact with people who have [symptoms of COVID-19](#) – they should be isolating if they show symptoms

## Spending time outdoors

The government has updated its guidance for people who are shielding, taking into account that COVID-19 disease levels have decreased substantially over the last few weeks.

You may now choose to go outside of your home to exercise, walk or spend some time outdoors. If you do so:

- keep the number of visits outside to a minimum (for instance once per day)
- go on your own or with members of your household. If you're shielding alone, you can meet one person from another household (ideally the same person each time you go out)
- go when there are fewer people around, such as early in the morning
- spend time in open areas
- always stay at least 2 metres, or 3 steps, away from other people
- take particular care to minimise contact with others outside your household
- do not share or exchange personal belongings (such as cups) with others
- do not go into enclosed spaces, such as other households, shops and buildings

If you would prefer not to go out, try spending time with the windows open to let in the fresh air, arrange a space to sit and see a nice view if possible, and get some natural sunlight or get out into any private space (such as a garden or balcony), keeping at least 2 metres away from your neighbours and household members at all times.

## Looking after your wellbeing while shielding

Being mentally and physically active has positive effects on your mental health and wellbeing (for example, it can reduce stress). Make sure you look after your wellbeing for as long as you're advised to shield by doing things such as:

- spending time doing activities that you enjoy such as reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to favourite radio programmes or watching TV
- trying to eat healthy, well-balanced meals and drinking enough water
- exercising or playing regularly. You can find [free 10-minute workouts](#) from Public Health England or other exercise videos to try at home on the [NHS Fitness Studio website](#)
- growing plants indoors or outdoors, if you have space
- staying in contact with friends and family by text, phone or video call – but you don't have to do this if you feel it's too much
- spending time doing volunteering and social action activities that you can do from home
- spending time with the windows open to let in the fresh air, arranging space to sit and see a nice view (if possible) and get some natural sunlight
- limiting your time reading the news or being on social media as this can make you feel more worried or anxious

[Looking after your mental wellbeing is an important part of shielding](#). It might make you feel worried or anxious if you're more likely to become very unwell from COVID-19. It can be stressful to be away from your friends, change your normal routine and become less active. You may find shielding and social distancing boring or frustrating.

There are links to support you at this time, especially for young people, at [Rise Above](#) and [Young Minds](#).

## How can people I live with support me to shield?

Families, supporters and carers also need to take precautions to help those most likely to get very unwell from COVID-19. They should [read the full guidance](#) for more information.

Most young people don't live alone. If you're shielding, then the rest of your family or household do not have to start shielding themselves, too, but they should do what they can to support you. This means carefully [following guidance on social distancing](#), and they should also try to:

- minimise the time they spend in shared areas, such as the kitchen, bathroom and living area, and avoid using the kitchen at the same time as you
- stay 2 metres away from you
- if possible, use a separate bathroom to you and always use different towels
- clean spaces after every use, including the kitchen and bathroom, using regular cleaning products
- regularly wash their hands and maintain good personal hygiene

Encourage the rest of your family or household to follow the advice as far as they're able.

## Receiving care from other people

If other people help you with basic or personal care needs, like help with washing, dressing, going to the toilet or eating, this should carry on.

Paid carers can get more information about how they can protect you from [the full guidance](#) on shielding for all ages. Family and friend carers may also find this helpful, so they know what paid carers should be doing to protect you.

Nurses or doctors can also carry on visiting you. Anyone coming into your home should wash their hands for 20 seconds using soap and water, or hand sanitiser if washing hands is not possible, immediately after entering.

But, if anyone who cares for you has [symptoms of COVID-19](#) they must not visit you and should self-isolate in line with the [stay at home guidance](#).

Make a plan for who will care for you if the people who usually do so are not able to because, for example, they're unwell.

Talk to your parents or carers about this and if you're not sure who else would be able to care for you, [contact your local council](#) for advice.

Use the phone or internet to keep in touch with other people. Health and social services are all still open so ring if you need them.

If you have any of the symptoms of COVID-19, you must self-isolate at home and arrange to have a test to see if you have COVID-19. Go to [testing](#) to arrange this or contact NHS 119 via telephone if you do not have internet access.

Do not go to hospital or your GP surgery without contacting them by phone or online first. If you need treatment, GPs, hospitals and other NHS services are still there to support and advise you. If there is an emergency, call 999. Explain that you're clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus and may get very unwell.

If you have GP or other health appointments during the time that you're shielding, these may be rearranged to be over the phone. Your GP or practitioner will be in contact with you if this is the case.

## Advice for young carers supporting someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable

If you're a young carer supporting someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, you can help protect them by:

- only providing essential care, unless they're your child
- preventing the spread of other airway and chest infections by [following the guidance on social distancing](#)
- not visiting or providing care to someone if you're unwell. Make a plan now for the alternative arrangements you will put in place for their care if you become unwell
- finding out more about the different sources of support that could be used if you become unwell and accessing further advice on how to create a back-up plan, which is available from [Carers UK](#)
- helping the person you care for know what they should do if they feel unwell and how to use [NHS 111 online coronavirus service](#), and leaving the number for NHS 111 somewhere that is very easy to see
- making sure to look after your own wellbeing and physical health during this time. There is more information and advice especially for young people at [Rise Above](#) and [Young Minds](#)

Is this page useful? ☐ Yes ☐ No

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