



Shielding clinically vulnerable people from covid-19 - Guidance and FAQs weekly bulletin

Shielding is a measure to protect people identified by the NHS who are clinically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19. Individuals who are clinically extremely vulnerable are strongly advised to stay at home as much as possible and keep visits outside to a minimum (for instance once per day).

This weekly bulletin provides updates on guidance and FAQs for councils in England only.

5 June 2020





The future of the programme

What has changed?

The Government announced some changes to its guidance for those shielding on 31 May 2020. This is because COVID-19 disease levels are substantially lower now than when this programme was first introduced.

People who are shielding can now leave their home if they wish, as long as they are able to maintain strict social distancing.

They can spend time outdoors, with members of their own household. If they live alone, they can spend time outdoors with one person from another household. Ideally, this should be the same person each time. If they do go out, they should take extra care to minimise contact with others by keeping 2 metres apart.

The overall support package for those shielding remains.

This advice is not mandatory, therefore a shielded person can choose to remain at home if they do not feel comfortable to go out.

This guidance will be kept under regular review.



(a) Stakeholder Engagement Forum

- The Stakeholder Engagement Forum brings together central government, councils and Local Resilience Forums in England to co-design, develop and deliver the key components of the local support system for shielding individuals, including the provision of food, medicines and social contact.
- Each region of England has a nominated Chief Executive who sits on the Forum on behalf of all authorities in that region.
- Chris Townsend (CEX, Shielding Directorate) attended the latest Stakeholder Engagement Forum which took place on Tuesday 2 June.
- He highlighted the next review for shielding will take place by week commencing 15 June. As part of that review, we will consider next steps beyond 30 June and Government will write to all shielded individuals with the result of that review.
- Defra presented the latest on the national emergency food box distribution. An additional stakeholder engagement forum will take place Tuesday 9 June to discuss this.

(b) We held a series of workshops with a focus on maintaining and improving the mental health and wellbeing of people who are advised to shield.

(c) We have held workshops on gathering data on local outcomes.

(d) We have also run a series of workshops with local authorities exploring future scenarios for the shielding programme. The key themes emerging from those were as follows:

- Workforce planning - including redeployed staff and volunteer capacity.
- Workspace and systems planning – including estates and IT systems.
- Increasing social isolation and mental health implications for those shielding.
- Consistent messaging about future of the programme.
- Dependency, ensuring programme development minimises dependencies on support offer.



Overview

This section gives answers to some frequently asked questions since the government announced the changes to the shielding programme. We are currently reviewing our guidance and FAQs document which will be issued to local authorities soon. That will provide further detail.

FAQs on recent changes

Q: *Does this mean an end to food parcels and supermarket priority slots for those shielding?*

Ans: The same support package remains, including food parcel and supermarket priority.

Q: *Does this mean an end to the shielding programme?*

Ans: The Government is currently advising people to shield until 30 June 2020 and is regularly monitoring this position.

Q: *How soon will we know if there will be an extension to the current 30 June 2020 end date for the shielding program?*

Ans: The government continues to review its covid-19 interventions including shielding for the clinically extremely vulnerable individuals. The next review is in the week commencing 15 June 2020 when the government will consider next steps for the shielding program as part of a wider Covid-19 review exercise. We will update local authorities and local partners once we have further clinical advice.

Q: *Are those shielding required to follow the new changes?*

Ans: This guidance is advisory. Shielded individuals will not be fined or sanctioned if they prefer to follow the guidance on staying alert and safe (social distancing). Individuals may also choose to remain in their own homes at all times if they do not feel comfortable with any form of contact with others. However, careful time outside in the fresh air is likely to make shielded individuals feel better in themselves.

Q: *Why do we still have to shield when the incidence of the virus is now so low?*

Ans: Whilst the fall in prevalence means that we are updating our guidance to now advise that those who are shielding can spend time outdoors once a day with low risk, it has not fallen enough to entirely lift shielding advice. If the prevalence of the virus continues to decline, we hope to be able to provide further advice on how individuals could safely relax their individual approaches to shielding. However, if the conditions become less favourable, this advice may need to be tightened. We will continue to listen to our medical advisers on the level of clinical risk the virus presents to different groups of people at different times.



Taking your feedback on board

Thank you for all your feedback to date. It helps us to refine the programme to better support those shielding. Recent concerns and our actions are set out below:

- **You told us that you had concerns with the quality of data from central government.**

We provided a direct generic Government Digital Service email address: transfer-coronavirus-data-service@digital.cabinet-office.gov.uk to facilitate resolution of data related queries.

- **You told us there were concerns about the quality of some food parcels to those shielding.**

We took this up directly with DEFRA who are actively investigating with the wholesalers.

- **You raised concerns with food delivery outcomes including delayed or non-deliveries.**

We are looking to gather data from local authorities on food delivery outcomes and other criteria.

- **You raised concerns about the process for informing individuals who no longer need to shield.**

We are working with the NHS to ensure messages are sensitively communicated.

- **You raised concerns about the duplication of records for individuals from your daily data flow.**

We are removing duplicate records of individuals from your daily incoming data. There will be a transitional period where we will send your hubs 3 files (file 1 will remove all duplicates per person, file 2 will remove only identical records and file 3 will show all data (no duplicate records removed) of daily incoming data.



Checklist

- Do those shielding in your area know how to contact you?
- Do you have a shielding dedicated phone line in place?
- Do you know what to do if someone is not aware of shielding or how to go about registering?
- Do you have an appropriate plan to engage those shielding individuals that we have not been able to contact by phone?
- Do you have relevant contact details for: MHCLG, DEFRA and Government Digital Service?

Further details can be found in our Guidance and FAQs document. Or email:shielding@communities.gov.uk