



[Patient Name

Patient address Line 1

Patient address Line 2

Patient address Line 3]

December 2020

IMPORTANT: PERSONAL

Your NHS number: [NHS NUMBER]

Dear [Patient],

Important advice to keep you safe from coronavirus

We are writing to you because you, or the named person you care for, may recently have been diagnosed with a condition, or started a new treatment, which means you are now considered to be at highest risk of becoming very unwell if you catch COVID-19 (sometimes referred to as being clinically extremely vulnerable).

We know that the pandemic has been really difficult for many people, and you may be worried about what you should do now you are considered to be at highest risk. The purpose of this letter is to make sure that you are aware of the higher risks and can protect yourself against them. You may want to read this letter through with a family member or carer to make sure you understand the advice it includes.

On 2 December, the Government reintroduced the system of local tiers. At each tier there are additional things people considered at highest risk are advised to do, whilst continuing to stay generally fit and well. There is a table at the bottom of this letter which summarises these things, which cover areas like socialising, travel, and going to work and school.

These extra steps are not rules, so you can choose whether or not you want to do them.

The full guidance can be found online at [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) and you can find out what tier your local area is in at [gov.uk/find-coronavirus-local-restrictions](https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-local-restrictions). You can also find answers to some of the questions you might have, including on the support that is available, at the end of this letter.

Please remember that the **NHS is open**, and we urge you to continue to access all the NHS services that you need. It is safer for you to use the NHS than to try to manage alone.

Thank you for your efforts to keep yourself and others safe.

Yours sincerely,

[Specialist/ consultant name]

[Department contact number]

Diseases and conditions considered to be very high risk

Adults with the following conditions are automatically deemed clinically extremely vulnerable:

- solid organ transplant recipients
- those with specific cancers:
 - people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
 - people with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
 - 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 that 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 6 months or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- those with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- those with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell disease)
- those on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection
- adults with Down's syndrome
- adults on dialysis or with chronic kidney disease (stage 5)
- pregnant women with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired
- other people who have also been classed as clinically extremely vulnerable, based on clinical judgement and an assessment of their needs. GPs and hospital clinicians have been provided with guidance to support these decisions

What does it mean to be considered at highest risk from COVID-19 (clinically extremely vulnerable)?

Some health conditions are likely to increase the risk that people who catch coronavirus become very unwell. Around 1 in 20 adults in England are considered to be at highest risk from COVID-19 (sometimes referred to as clinically extremely vulnerable) – over two million people – so you are not alone in facing these higher risks.

Although you are strongly advised to take greater precautions, the risk of becoming very unwell is still small, and we recommend that you continue to balance these additional precautions with the need to stay generally fit and well.

Do I need to shield?

No. People considered to be at highest risk were previously advised by the Government to 'shield'. This meant staying at home as much as possible and avoiding contact with others.

The Government is not currently advising anyone to formally 'shield'.

In the future, the Government may reintroduce shielding advice in the very worst affected high-risk areas, and for a limited period of time. It does NOT automatically apply if you are in a Tier Three: Very High alert area.

The Government will write to you separately to tell you if you are advised to shield. You are not advised to shield unless you receive a letter from the Government.

Please make sure your GP has your most up to date contact details, including your home address, and if possible a personal email address, so that we know how to contact you.

Can I access NHS services?

Yes. The NHS is open, and we urge you to continue to access all the NHS services that you need.

You can also quickly and easily access a range of NHS services from home, including ordering repeat prescriptions or having an online appointment with your health professional. To find out more visit www.nhs.uk/health-at-home, or download the [NHS App](https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/the-nhs-app/) at <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/the-nhs-app/>. You should also continue to receive support from social care if you require it.

What should I do if I have symptoms of coronavirus?

If you have any of the symptoms of coronavirus (a new continuous cough, a high temperature, or a loss of, or change in, your sense of taste or smell), you must self-isolate at home and arrange to have a test to see if you have coronavirus. Go to the NHS website to arrange a test or contact NHS 119 via telephone if you do not have internet access.

What support is available?

Please visit www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support to get more information on what government support is available to everyone during the pandemic.

Your local council may run local support networks or hubs, and there might be local charities in your area that can provide you with any extra help you need. Your local council's website will have more information about this.

NHS Volunteer Responders are also available to help with things like collecting shopping, medication or other essential supplies and with transport to medical appointments. They can

also provide a regular, friendly phone call which can be provided by different volunteers each time or by someone who was previously advised to shield and will stay in contact for several weeks. More information is available at www.nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk or you can call 0808 196 3646 between 8am and 8pm.

If you are in a Tier Three: Very High alert area you can also register via www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support to request access to priority supermarket deliveries, if you do not have someone you can rely on to go shopping for you. If you already have priority deliveries with a supermarket, that will continue – you do not need to do anything further.

If you are in a Tier Three: Very High alert area and need other forms of help, you should contact your local council directly. Find out how your local council can help you at www.gov.uk/coronavirus-local-help.

Can I access mental health support?

It is normal during these uncertain and unusual times to feel anxious or feel low. You can go to Every Mind Matters (www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters) and GOV.UK for advice and tailored, practical steps that you can take to support your wellbeing. If you are still struggling to cope, we would urge you to speak to a GP.

Further information on coronavirus, including guidance from Public Health England, can be found at www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19 and www.gov.uk/coronavirus.

Can I get Vitamin D supplements?

During the autumn and winter months everyone is advised to take a supplement of vitamin D every day to support general health and in particular for bone and muscle health. Many of us have been indoors more than usual this year and so might not have been making enough vitamin D from sunlight. You can find general advice on vitamin D here: www.nhs.uk/vitamin-d

This advice is particularly important for people who have been shielding this year due to COVID-19, or who are living in care homes, because they are most likely to have been indoors over the spring and summer and so may not have been able to obtain enough vitamin D from sunlight.

The Government is offering a free 4-month supply of daily supplements of vitamin D for all adults who are clinically extremely vulnerable to support general health and in particular for bone and muscle health. If you would like to opt-in to receive your free supply of vitamin D, you will need register your details between 30 November 2020 and 4 January 2021 at the following link: www.nhs.uk/get-vitamin-d You should read the Government's guidance on taking Vitamin D safely before opting in: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vitamin-d-supplements-how-to-take-them-safely>

You do not need to opt-in to receive the vitamin D supplements if:

- You are already taking, or are prescribed, a vitamin D supplement by your GP or healthcare professional
- You are currently living in a nursing or residential care home as we will provide these direct to the home where you live.

We expect to start distributing the vitamin D supplements from January 2021. Further guidance on how to safely take vitamin D supplements will be provided during the opt in process.

Is there different guidance over the festive period?

From 23 to 27 December, the Government will be changing some restrictions on social contact. This allows you to form a 'Christmas bubble' in which you can spend time indoors and outdoors with people from up to three households, including your own. You can choose to be part of a Christmas bubble if you are clinically extremely vulnerable, but it does involve greater risks for you as you will be increasing the number of people you have contact with.

It is important that you and the other people in your Christmas bubble consider these risks carefully before agreeing to form a bubble. Forming a Christmas bubble is a personal choice and should be balanced against the increased risk of infection. More information on Christmas bubbles can be found at the end of this letter.



Guidance for the festive period

We recognise that many people may want to be with their friends and family over the festive period, particularly after a very difficult year. As a result, the Government will be changing some restrictions on social contact, allowing you to form a 'Christmas bubble' in which you can spend time indoors and outdoors, including in your home, with people from up to three households including your own.

This will only apply for a very limited period of time, from 23 December to 27 December. More information about the rules on Christmas bubbles can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family

You can choose to be part of a Christmas bubble if you are clinically extremely vulnerable, but it does involve greater risks for you as you will be increasing the number of people you have contact with. You will continue to minimise your risk of infection if you limit social contact with people that you do not live with, even at Christmas. It is important that you and the other people in your Christmas bubble consider these risks carefully before agreeing to form a bubble. Forming a Christmas bubble is a personal choice and should be balanced against the increased risk of infection.

If you do decide to form a Christmas bubble, it is advised that you maintain social distance from those you don't normally live with at all times, avoiding physical contact. Everyone should wash their hands more often and touch points, such as door handles and surfaces, should be kept clean. It is also important to allow fresh air into the space where you spend time with those you don't normally live with. You may want to think about who you sit next to, including during meals, and also consider wearing a face covering indoors where social distancing may be difficult.

If you don't feel comfortable spending time with other people indoors, think of other ways that you can safely spend time together, for example on walks outdoors or supported by technology, and how you can make that time feel different and special. Going outdoors carefully for exercise is also encouraged. It is important that you do not feel pressured to celebrate Christmas in an environment that makes you anxious.

There may be a lot of expectation and pressure around celebrating Christmas together, but you should feel comfortable to do what is right for you over this period. To do that, it is important that the other people in your Christmas bubble understand your needs and increased risk. They can help by being extra vigilant in the days before you get together, reducing any unnecessary contact with people, especially as some people with the virus have no symptoms.

Once the Christmas bubble period ends on 27 December, you should follow the guidance that was in place before Christmas, in line with the restrictions for your local area.



Summary of advice for the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) for each local Tier

You must follow the rules and restrictions that relate to the Tier your local area is in – they apply to everyone.

This table summarises the additional things you are advised to do to keep yourself safe at each local Tier.

CARE AND SUPPORT

- At all local Tiers we urge you to continue to access the care and support you need
- You should continue to access NHS services, and you should contact the NHS if you have an urgent or emergency care need
- If you are in a Tier Three: Very High alert area and need extra support at home, please contact your local council. You can find the contact details by looking on your local council’s website

SOCIALISING

TIER 1: MEDIUM	TIER 2: HIGH	TIER 3: VERY HIGH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strictly observe social distancing • Meet outside if possible • Keep the number of different people you meet low • Still go outside for exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of different people you meet • Still go outside for exercise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay at home as much as possible • Still go outside for exercise

TRAVEL

TIER 1: MEDIUM	TIER 2: HIGH	TIER 3: VERY HIGH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit unnecessary journeys on public transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid travel where possible except for going to work, school, or for essential shopping • If you need to travel, walking, cycling, or travelling in a private car are safer than public transport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid travel where possible except for going to work, school, or for essential shopping • Stay at home as much as possible

WORK AND SCHOOL

TIER 1: MEDIUM	TIER 2: HIGH	TIER 3: VERY HIGH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work from home where possible • Attend work if you cannot work from home • You should continue to attend school or college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work from home where possible • Attend work if you cannot work from home • You should continue to attend school or college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work from home where possible • If you cannot work from home, speak to your employer about taking on an alternative role or change your working patterns temporarily. You can attend work if this is not possible • You should continue to attend school or college

GOING TO THE SHOPS AND THE PHARMACY

TIER 1: MEDIUM	TIER 2: HIGH	TIER 3: VERY HIGH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider shopping or visiting the pharmacy at quieter times of the day • Strictly observe good hand hygiene and maintain social distancing as much as possible • NHS Volunteer Responders can support you if you need help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of shopping trips you make, including to pharmacies • Consider using online delivery slots for food shopping, or ask friends and family to help deliver shopping or collect medicines for you • NHS Volunteer Responders can support you if you need help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly reduce your shopping trips, including to pharmacies • Consider using online delivery slots for food shopping, or ask friends and family to help deliver shopping or collect medicines for you • NHS Volunteer Responders or your local authority can support you if you need help

This is a summary of the guidance only. It is effective from 2 December 2020. For more information visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19