

# Communities Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 31 May 2020

As Communities Secretary, I will be updating you on our support for the most vulnerable people in society, I'll be updating you on how we're shielding people from coronavirus in England, and the next steps in our programme of support for rough sleepers during this pandemic.

But first, I want to update you on the latest data on the coronavirus response.

- 4,285,738 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 115,725 tests carried out yesterday
- 274,762 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 1,936 cases since yesterday
- 7,639 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, down 15 % from 8,945 this time last week
- And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 38,489 have now died. That's an increase of 113 fatalities since yesterday.

Behind each of those deaths is a mourning family, and heartbroken friends and loved ones. Our thoughts and prayers, as ever, are with all of them.

At the start of this pandemic, we advised Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people to shield until the 30 June. These are individuals who are most at risk of severe illness if they contract the virus – so protecting them has been especially important during the pandemic.

I think it's important to explain who is shielding.

They are not exclusively older people. Over half are under 70. Over 90,000 of them are actually children and they sadly will not be able to return to school tomorrow if their year group is. And hundreds of thousands of those shielding are – or were – at work before the pandemic. Many of these people are working from home, but where this is not possible, they are unable to do the jobs I am sure they would wish to be doing.

The one thing they all have in common is that they have made a huge sacrifice. I would like to echo the Prime Minister in recognising the resilience of people shielding across the country and express our admiration for their ongoing efforts.

We know that they often live with other people, so this has had profound impact on their lives as well – and family members have often had to sacrifice a lot to protect the people they love the most. And I know that a significant number of those shielding haven't left the house at all for 9 or 10 weeks – that is quite an extraordinary restriction on their lives.

For those who were advised to shield, we set up the National Shielding

Service, a huge logistical exercise, unprecedented since the Second World War.

This has included delivering over two and half million free food boxes, securing priority supermarket delivery services, ensuring people could get medicines delivered to their doorstep, and working closely in partnership with local government and our fantastic NHS volunteer responders helping people in a myriad of other ways, be that delivering shopping, calling people for a 'check in and chat' or providing essential care.

Over 350,000 who are shielding have registered for some support from government, like food, like medicine deliveries. But more than half of those shielding have also said to us they want someone to talk to over the phone – so none of us should forget the emotional burden isolation places upon people, and the effects on mental health and general wellbeing.

For anyone, shielding or not, it's important you seek the help you need. And it is available despite the restrictions. So please, if this is you go to [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) or the [Every Mind Matters website](https://www.everymindmatters.org/) for advice and practical steps as to what you can do and the support that's available for your wellbeing during this time.

I am immensely grateful to all of those in the NHS who have and continue to go above and beyond to support those most at risk during the virus.

We also recognise the role of local councils and parish councils, who have supported their residents with great effect.

When we announced a gradual relaxation of restrictions in the last week, I know that many people who are shielding will have been asking: what about me?

Today we are setting out the next steps for the shielded.

Now that we've passed the peak and the prevalence of COVID-19 in the community has reduced significantly, we believe that the risk to those shielding is lower, as it is proportionately for the general population.

As with the guidance for shielded people more generally, we want to give people the information and advice they need to make the best decisions for them. This is, as always advisory, for the shielded.

So, as a first step, I can announce today that we have updated the shielding guidance so that from tomorrow, Monday the 1st of June, people will be advised that they can take initial steps to safely spend time outdoors. This guidance is for England only but we are working very closely with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who will issue their own guidance in due course.

Those shielding will be able to spend time outdoors with members of their own household or, if they live alone, with one person from another household.

This reflects a lower risk of transmission outdoors, as well as the significantly reduced prevalence of COVID-19 in the community. The full

guidance will be uploaded to GOV.UK later today.

You must still follow social distancing guidelines and remain at a 2 metre distance from others.

This will enable those shielding to see loved ones, like children and grandchildren.

Something many I know, are aching to do.

Having spent many weeks indoors, some will understandably be very cautious and concerned about going outdoors. You should only do what you are comfortable with.

In our road map we set out, while the shielding guidance is currently in place until the end of June, it may need to be extended beyond that point. Our guidance to those who are shielding will always be advisory, but it is also critical that it is based on the most up to date evidence and data.

So today, I can say that as part of each review for the social distancing measures for the wider population, we will also review the risks for the clinically extremely vulnerable and assess whether, as we currently believe, the shielding period needs to be extended, and whether it is possible for the shielding guidance to be eased further.

We will base each assessment on clinical advice from our medical experts, and the best data available about the prevalence of COVID-19 within the community.

The next review of shielding measures will take place the week commencing 15 June and will consider the next steps for the programme more generally beyond 30 June.

Following that review, the NHS will also write to all individuals on the shielding patient list with information about next steps on shielding advice and the support that will be available to them.

If the conditions become less favourable, our advice to those being asked to shield will unfortunately need to be tightened.

The Government will continue to ensure that support is available to those who need it for as long as possible and for as long as people are advised to follow shielding guidance.

Once again, can I thank all those shielding for your patience and fortitude thus far. Everyone in the country appreciates the unique challenges you face, and we want to continue to do all we can to ensure that whilst you may be at home, shielding, you are not alone.

Secondly, I wanted to provide an update on our work on rough sleeping. And I'm joined by the Prime Minister's advisor on rough sleeping, Dame Louise Casey.

From the start of this pandemic, we believed we had a special duty to protect the most vulnerable people in our society. And this was especially necessary for those people sleeping rough on our streets.

Working hand-in-hand with charities and local councils, we have offered accommodation to over 90% of rough sleepers known to us at the start in order to help them stay safe during the pandemic.

I want to thank everyone who has been involved in this huge national effort. Thousands of lives have been protected as a result of your work.

We've ensured councils in England have the funding to help continue housing rough sleepers in emergency accommodation as part of the £3.8 billion we've provided them in the last 2 months. And we will continue to fund this essential work to get the job done.

But, as we enter the next phase in our fight against coronavirus, it is right that we start to look ahead.

Our goal has always been that as few people as possible return to the streets. But words and promises are not enough.

Because of the action we have already taken, for the first time, in my lifetime, we know who the vast majority of rough sleepers are and where they are living.

That means we can assess each individual's needs and tailor the support we provide next. Some people will need help to return to the private rental sector, but others will need accommodation to be provided so they can start to rebuild their lives.

That is why 6,000 new supported homes will be made available for rough sleepers, providing safe accommodation for people we have helped off the streets during the pandemic.

The government is backing this effort with £433 million to fast-track the safe accommodation desperately needed to ensure as few rough sleepers as possible return to the streets.

3,300 of these new homes will become available in the next 12 months, and £160 million will be spent this year to deliver that.

But rough sleeping is as much a health issue as it is a housing issue – it is a crisis of addiction and mental health as well.

So we will provide specialist support staff for rough sleepers in this new accommodation to ensure they can continue to receive the health support they will need to transform their lives and fulfil their potential.

These homes will be a springboard to better things. And they will serve as a new national asset and be a symbol of hope and our belief that no one's path is predetermined.

I'm now going to pass over to Dame Louise Casey.