

Prime Minister hails resilience of shielders as restrictions set to ease

- 2.2 million people shielding in England to be able to spend time outdoors from tomorrow (Monday 1 June)
- Guidance to be updated to allow interaction outside with their household from tomorrow
- Unprecedented package of support for those shielding from coronavirus is also set to continue

Extremely vulnerable people who have been “shielding” in England can now safely spend time outdoors, the Communities Secretary will confirm today (Sunday 31 May).

The 2.2 million clinically extremely vulnerable people will be able to go outside with members of their household, while continuing to follow social distancing guidelines.

Those who live alone can meet outside with one other person from another household.

The updated guidance provides a much-needed boost to those most at risk who have been staying inside their homes to protect themselves and the NHS.

This includes many who have not had any face-to-face contact since they were first advised to shield.

The government’s unprecedented package of support for those shielding from coronavirus is also set to continue, including the delivery of food or medicines, phone calls and support from volunteers.

Speaking at the government’s daily press conference later today, the Communities Secretary is expected to set out a plan to review shielding guidance at regular points in the coming weeks.

At each review point for the social distancing measures, we will also assess whether it is possible for the shielding guidance to be eased further, based on the latest scientific advice. The next review will take place later this month.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

I want to thank everyone who has followed the shielding guidance –

it is because of your patience and sacrifice that thousands of lives have been saved.

I do not underestimate just how difficult it has been for you, staying at home for the last 10 weeks, and I want to pay tribute to your resilience.

I also want to recognise the hundreds of thousands of extraordinary volunteers who have supported you in shielding.

Whether through delivering medicines and shopping, or simply by checking in on those isolating, they should feel deeply proud of the part they have played in this collective effort.

We have been looking at how we can make life easier for our most vulnerable, so today I am happy to confirm that those who are shielding will be able to spend time outside with someone else, observing social distance guidelines.

I will do what I can, in line with the scientific advice, to continue making life easier for you over the coming weeks and months.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Those shielding from coronavirus have made huge sacrifices over recent months to protect both themselves and the NHS – they deserve our thanks and our support for their efforts.

Incidence rates of coronavirus are now significantly lower than before these measures were put in place. That's why we are focused on finding the right balance between continuing to protect those at the greatest clinical risk, whilst easing restrictions on their daily lives to make the difficult situation more bearable – particularly enabling the contact with loved ones they and we all seek.

We will now be providing regular updates to the shielded to guide them through the next phase and we hope, to better and less restrictive times. In the meantime we will continue to provide the support that the shielded in our communities need.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

The resilience and commitment people have shown throughout this unprecedented period has been nothing short of phenomenal, and none more so than those who have shielded in their homes.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the NHS, GPs, all those

who volunteered, community pharmacists and all those involved in providing much-needed support and guidance for patients required to shield over the past 10 weeks.

Thanks to the sacrifices made across the country, which have protected the NHS and saved lives, it's now time to begin lifting restrictions, step by step, and while we must all stay alert, we can now start to resume a sense of normality.

To date support for those being shielded includes:

- Over 2.25 million boxes of essential food have now been delivered by wholesalers to those at highest risk across England, with more than 300,000 boxes being distributed every week.
- Up to 200,000 calls a day have been made to the shielded to confirm their support needs, and councils are helping to support them in other ways – including organising regular calls from volunteers to those isolated.
- In addition to those delivered by volunteers, there have been over 400,000 free medicine deliveries provided by community pharmacies in April to those who have been advised to shield.
- Support from an army of over 500,000 NHS volunteers have helped support those shielding as well as others with telephone calls to individuals who are at risk of loneliness as a consequence of self-isolation.

As the government moves to the next phase of its response to the coronavirus crisis, the latest clinical advice shows a much lower incidence rate in the general population.

This means the average chance of catching the virus is now down from 1/40 to 1/1000, delivering greater reassurance that it is safe to cautiously reflect this in the guidance for those who have been advised to shield.

The importance of following social distancing guidelines for anyone shielding is still paramount, and therefore while outside people who are shielding should remain at a 2-metre distance from others.

Those being shielded still remain at risk and are advised to only leave the house once a day. They should not go to work or the shops and should avoid crowded places where they can't social distance.

The updated guidance for those who are shielding will be published on Sunday afternoon in advance of the measures coming into force from Monday.

There are around 2.2 million people in England with underlying severe health

conditions who must be protected and have been asked to stay at home. These are people of all ages – with specific medical conditions identified by the NHS – who are less able to fight off the virus. (See the [full list of conditions.](#))

There are a number of ways that those who are shielding can access food and other essentials:

- Make use of the supermarket priority delivery slots that are available for this group. When a clinically extremely vulnerable person registers online as needing support with food, their data is shared with supermarkets. This means if they make an online order with a supermarket (as both a new or existing customer), they will be eligible for a priority slot.
- If a person meets the criteria to get support from the NHS Volunteer Responders programme, they can call 0808 196 3646 to be linked with a volunteer who can do a food shop for them. A carer or family member can also do this on their behalf.
- If you need urgent help and have no other means of support, [contact your local authority](#) to find out what support services are available in their area.
- Use the many commercial options now available for accessing food, including telephone ordering, food box delivery, prepared meal delivery and other non-supermarket food delivery providers. [A list has been shared with local authorities and charities.](#)

If someone who is shielding doesn't need the free government food box anymore, including because they have started to get online supermarket deliveries, they should re-register through the gov.uk website as no longer needing a food delivery. Alternatively, they can inform their delivery driver at the door that you no longer require these food parcels.

People in the shielding group should continue to access the NHS services they need during this time. This may be delivered in a different way or in a different place than they are used to, for example via an online consultation, but if they do need to go to hospital or attend another health facility for planned care, extra planning and protection will be put in place.

An NHS Medicine Delivery Service is available from community pharmacies and dispensing doctors. It ensures the delivery of medicines to shielded patients where family, friends or volunteers cannot collect them.

If a person meets the criteria to get support from the NHS Volunteer Responders programme, they can call 0808 196 3646 to be linked with a

volunteer who can help them is a range of different ways. A carer or family member can also call the programme on their behalf.

Mental health support

Follow the advice that works for you in the guidance on [how to look after your mental health and wellbeing during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

The [Every Mind Matters page on anxiety](#) and [NHS mental wellbeing audio guides](#) provide further information on how to manage anxiety.