

March 2022

Dear Employer

We remain grateful to you, as an employer, for your work in supporting staff at highest risk of complications, severe illness and death from Covid throughout the pandemic and are asking for your ongoing help to enable vulnerable staff keep safe.

We are moving into a new phase of managing Covid and legal requirements are replaced by public health guidance on reducing the spread of the virus. While everyone wants to get back to normal, some people with specific medical conditions or on particular treatments remain at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell or dying from Covid than the general population, despite vaccination. On 24 February 2022, Government published [specific advice](#) for this group in England. It advises reducing time in enclosed crowded spaces, ensuring good ventilation and:

“Work from home if this feels right for you – if you cannot work from home, speak to your employer about what arrangements they can make to reduce your risk”

We are concerned that this specific guidance for immunosuppressed people may have been lost in the overall guidance changes and we therefore urge employers to continue to do all they can to support requests to work from home from your employees at highest risk from Covid. To protect those who cannot work from home, reasonable adjustments and strict adherence to risk reducing measures (set out in [working safely guidance¹](#)) remains as important as ever.

We know many employers support their employees at highest risk to work from home or, if this is not possible, to make adjustments that reduce risk. We do however hear from people that do not feel safe at work. We are also aware that many people may not be aware of the potential for reduced vaccine protection among individuals who are immunosuppressed. As charities supporting higher risk individuals, we are keen to work with employers to ensure that people are supported to continue in their employment, without increasing their risk from Covid.

Individuals who may have reduced protection from vaccination

Studies² have found a lower antibody response to the Covid vaccine among a significant proportion of people who have a weakened immune response due to a health condition or because they receive certain treatments. In response, the

¹ Government have stated Working Safely Guidance will be replaced by new public health guidance from 1 April and after this “[Employers should continue to consider the needs of employees at greater risk from COVID-19, including those whose immune system means they are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19.](#)”

² [Octave Study](#)

Government offer up to five vaccine doses to this group, to try to increase their levels of protection against Covid. However, studies show that even after multiple doses some individuals in this group will continue to have less vaccine protection and be at higher risk from Covid.³ People who are immunosuppressed now make up a [greater proportion of those admitted to intensive care](#) with Covid than earlier in the pandemic.⁴

Government advises people at highest risk from Covid (previously called Clinically Extremely Vulnerable) to seek guidance from their doctors on their ongoing risk and for employers to take account of this medical advice. We — as patient organisations — also provide Covid vaccine information on our websites, which we keep updated with the latest information, including on vaccine effectiveness. We invite you to make maximum use of these resources, and to signpost them to your staff. We hope that these resources will be useful to you in underpinning joint decision making about working arrangements. We have set out some of our key recommendations below:

Keeping your workforce safe

There is useful guidance on supporting people who may be more at risk from Covid as well as those who are immunosuppressed within the [Working Safely guidance](#) and [HSE guidance](#). We highlight the following key points:

People who test positive for Covid should not come to work

- Although the legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive Covid test has ended, Government guidance states people with Covid should not attend work. Following this guidance will provide crucial protection for employees who remain at higher risk.

Enable working from home

- In recognition of their ongoing risk, guidance for people who are immunosuppressed is to work from home if it feels right for them. We urge employers to do everything they can to enable people to do so. Where they cannot work from home, strict adherence to Covid safe measures is vital to safeguard people who are at highest risk from the virus.

Risk assessments

- Comprehensive and individualised [risk assessments](#), informed by medical advice where appropriate, which are monitored and adjusted in light of changes such as fluctuating local prevalence, new variants of concern and data about vaccine protection. Assessments for people with fluctuating long-term conditions will also need review in response to changes in health or medication. The [Covid-age calculator](#) is a helpful tool for risk assessments that takes into account health conditions and other factors to estimate vulnerability.

³ [Octave Study](#)

⁴ Please note that all data we have is based on outcomes from the Delta variant, there is uncertainty regarding the Omicron variant, but great caution is recommended.

- [Specialist risk tools](#) for specific conditions are available to clinicians to inform their medical advice on individual risk to employees, for example the UK Kidney Association [risk grid for Kidney Disease](#).

Safety best practice

- Emphasising to the [wider workforce](#) the importance of continuing to stringently apply Covid safety measures and reminding them of the shared responsibility to reduce everyone's risk from Covid, particularly those most at risk.
- Supporting regular lateral flow testing for the virus to keep everyone protected (free LFTs are available until 1st April 2022).
- Ensuring [good ventilation](#) throughout the workplace.
- Considering continuing measures to enable greater social distancing (e.g. limiting numbers) in indoor and more crowded areas, and supporting people to continue to wear facemasks if they choose to do so.

Reasonable adjustments

- Discussing and implementing reasonable adjustments such as working from home wherever possible, or if not flexible start times to avoid peak time travel on public transport, or moving away from public facing roles. Funding for adjustments may be available from [Access to Work](#) scheme.

Individuals will have different views on what feels right for them, and some of your staff may have very legitimate concerns about their own ongoing risks from Covid. We hope this will be discussed during the risk assessment process and have significant bearing on decision making.

Mental wellbeing support

We would also like to underline the potential mental health needs of staff at higher risk. Living with the threat of serious illness or death should they contract Covid, in many cases shielding for over a year, and the ongoing uncertainty has placed a huge toll on the mental health of individuals more at risk from the virus. Our websites provide links to support for people affected by long term conditions and once again we encourage you to signpost your staff to these as relevant; they are included at the bottom of the letter.

We recognise the huge amount of work done by employers throughout the pandemic and would like to thank you again for the ongoing support made available to vulnerable staff and their families.

We remain ready and willing to provide any support, guidance and information that may be helpful as you continue to support your workforce through what has been an extraordinarily challenging time.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Bristow, Chief Executive, Kidney Care UK
Gemma Peters, Chief Executive, Blood Cancer UK
Charlotte Augst, Chief Executive, National Voices
Genevieve Edwards, Chief Executive Officer, Bowel Cancer UK
Clare Jacklin, Chief Executive, National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society
Nick Moberly, Chief Executive, MS Society
Tess Harris, Chief Executive, PKD Charity
Henny Braund MBE, Chief Executive, Anthony Nolan
Sue Brown, Chief Executive, Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance
Stevie Tyler, Chief Executive Officer, The Aplastic Anaemia Trust
Georgina Carr, Chief Executive, Neurological Alliance
Dr Susan Walsh, Chief Executive, Immunodeficiency UK
Catherine Woodhead, Chief Executive Officer, Muscular Dystrophy UK
Andrea Brown, Chief Executive Officer, National Kidney Federation
Peter Tichbon, Executive Chairperson, SarcoidosisUK
David Ramsden, Chief Executive, Cystic Fibrosis Trust
Sandra Currie, Chief Executive, Kidney Research UK
Bridget Turner, Director of Policy, Campaigns and Improvement, Diabetes UK
Kim Chaplain, Associate Director for Work, Centre for Ageing Better
Ellen Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Versus Arthritis
Sue Farrington, Chief Executive, Scleroderma and Raynaud's UK
Sarah Sleet, Chief Executive, Crohn's & Colitis UK

Covid information:

Anthony Nolan

anthohnolan.org/patients-and-families/understanding-stem-cell-transplants/coronavirus-Covid-and-your-stem-cell

Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance

arma.uk.net/Covid-coronavirus-info/

Blood Cancer UK

bloodcancer.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus-Covid/

Bowel Cancer UK

bowelcanceruk.org.uk/news-and-blogs/coronavirus-faqs/

Cystic Fibrosis UK

cysticfibrosis.org.uk/life-with-cystic-fibrosis/coronavirus

Crohn's & Colitis UK

crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/

Diabetes UK

diabetes.org.uk/about_us/news/coronavirus

Immunodeficiency UK

www.immunodeficiencyuk.org

immunodeficiencyuk.org/livingwithimmunodeficiency/affectedadultswithpids/helpingpeoplereiturntoworkaftershielding

Kidney Care UK

www.kidneycareuk.org/coronavirus

Kidney Research UK

[Coronavirus and kidney disease - Kidney Research UK](http://Coronavirus%20and%20kidney%20disease%20-%20Kidney%20Research%20UK)

MS Society

mssociety.org.uk/care-and-support/ms-and-coronavirus-care-and-support

Muscular Dystrophy UK

muscular dystrophyuk.org/get-the-right-care-and-support/coronavirus-information-and-advice-for-people-with-muscle-wasting-conditions/

National Kidney Federation

www.kidney.org.uk/News/coronavirus-latest-information-and-advice

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society

nras.org.uk/information-support/information/coronavirus-and-ra/

www.nras.org.uk/resource/work/

PKD Charity

www.pkdcharity.org.uk/news-events/latest-news/13-Covid-coronavirus-and-polycystic-kidney-disease-update

SarcoidosisUK

<https://www.sarcoidosisuk.org/coronavirus>

Scleroderma and Raynaud's UK

sr.uk.co.uk/find-support/coronavirus/

The Aplastic Anaemia Trust

www.theaat.org.uk/listing/?categorytitle=Covid-guidance

Versus Arthritis

www.versusarthritis.org/Covid-updates/Covid-employment-and-work-information/