

Covid-19: HR Guidance - Protecting yourself and others Social Distancing, Extremely Clinically and Clinically Vulnerable Employees

Last updated: 15 June 2020

This guidance is regularly being reviewed

1. Staying Alert and Safe - Social Distancing

The government has set out a plan to return life to as near normal as we can, for as many people as we can, as quickly and fairly as possible in order to safeguard livelihoods, but in a way that is safe and continues to protect our NHS.

From Monday 1 June:

- Everyone can spend time outdoors, including private gardens and other outdoor spaces, in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines
- Employees can return to work, those employees that are able to effectively work from home should continue to do so, manager's will advise staff if they are required to attend the workplace, the workplace will be "Covid-19 secure" and all required health and safety measures, including risk assessments and training, will be in place
- Shops are beginning to reopen, with a plan for more to do so later in the month
- Children in early years (age 0-5), reception, year 1 and year 6 can return to childcare or school in line with the arrangements made by their school

Employees can be tested as part of the test and trace programme which will enable us to return to normal life as soon as possible, by helping to control transmission risks. For further information, refer to the Covid-19 HR guidance on protecting yourself and others isolation, testing, test and trace.

Everyone has a duty to stay alert and follow social distancing guidelines. The Government message is you must not:

- gather in groups of more than six people with people you do not live with
- visit friends or family inside their home or any other indoor place
- stay away from your own home overnight, except for in a limited set of circumstances, such as for work purposes
- Public Health England recommends trying to keep two metres away from people as a precaution. The key thing is to not be too close to people for more than a short period of time, as much as you can.
- Wash your hands often using soap and water, and dry them thoroughly.

- Where available, use sanitiser outside your home, especially as you enter a building and after you have had contact with surfaces.
- Avoid touching your face.
- You can lower the risk of infection if you stay side-to-side rather than facing someone.

2. Clinically extremely vulnerable 'Shielding'

Employees who are extremely clinically vulnerable have been advised by the government to stay at home as doctors in England have identified specific medical conditions that, place some people at greatest risk of severe illness from Covid-19. These individuals are commonly referred to as "shielding." This group includes:

1. Solid organ transplant recipients.
2. People 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 which 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
3. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
4. People with rare diseases that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell).
5. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
6. Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.
7. Other people 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.

Employees who are at very high risk of severe illness from Covid-19 because of an underlying health condition are required to stay at home until at least the 30 June. The government will review the shielding position and guidance will be amended accordingly.

These employees should work from home wherever possible. If an employee is unable to work from home – either because they provide a public-facing service or because they are unable to access the ICT required to work from home – the manager should try to find another solution. This may include redeploying the individual to another role that the employee is able to undertake at home. If a solution cannot be found and the individual remains unable to work, they will continue to receive their normal pay. This will remain the case so long as the government guidance on shielding remains in force.

The Covid-19 absence categories in Oracle do not differentiate between employees who are shielding and those who are absent for other reasons – for example, because they have symptoms of Covid-19 and are required to isolate. For this reason, we intend to compile a definitive record of all employees who are shielding, which will be held securely by the HR team. Managers of an employee who is shielding should notify HR of the employee's status by emailing newham.hrsupport@newham.gov.uk no later than 30 June and sooner wherever possible. This notification should include confirmation of whether the individual is able to work from home and evidence of their shielding status – for example, a copy of the letter the NHS has sent to all individuals in this group. If an employee is unable to provide evidence of their shielding status, the manager should contact HR for further advice.

3. Clinically vulnerable employees

Employees who are clinically vulnerable have been advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to stringently observe social distancing at all times. Employees falling into this extremely vulnerable group include:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab each year on medical grounds):
- chronic (long-term) mild to moderate respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
- chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), or cerebral palsy
- diabetes
- a weakened immune system as the result of certain conditions or medicines they are taking (such as steroid tablets)
- being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
- pregnant women

As of the date of this guidance, managers should not ask employees who are clinically vulnerable to attend their place of work. These employees should work from home wherever possible. If an employee is unable to work from home – either because they provide a public-facing service or because they are unable to access the ICT required to work from home – managers should try to find another solution. This may include redeploying the individual to another role that the employee is able to undertake at home. If a solution cannot be found and the individual remains unable to work, they will continue to receive their normal pay.

When the government announced its lockdown measures, individuals in this category were advised to stay at home as much as possible for a period of twelve weeks. This period began on Monday 23 March and therefore ends on Sunday 14 June. Managers of an employee who is clinically vulnerable and unable to work from home, should proactively make contact with the employee and advise them of the following:

- the twelve week “stay at home as much as possible” period is due to end on Sunday 14 June
- the latest government guidance is that people in this category can leave their homes, including to attend work, so long as they stringently observe social distancing
- we may ask the employee to return to the workplace from Monday 15 June, but this will only be the case if the following conditions apply:
 - the employee’s workplace has been made “Covid-19 secure”
 - all relevant health and safety measures, including risk assessments and training, are in place
 - the employee’s job role cannot be undertaken effectively from home
 - a “reintroduction to the workplace” meeting is held with the employee upon their return

Further guidance on these employees will follow. In the meantime, it is important that managers contact employees in this category to explain the information set out above and ensure they are prepared for a potential return to the workplace.