

April 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 hope that in doing so you will also profit from greater productivity, morale and loyalty from your workforce,

In England, legal requirements are now being replaced by public health guidance on reducing the spread of the Covid 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 1 April 2022, the Government updated its [specific advice](#) for the immunosuppressed group in England. It advises:

“If it feels right for you, work from home if you can. If you cannot work from home, speak to your employer about what arrangements they can make to reduce your risk. It may be that you are entitled to a [Reasonable Adjustment under the Equality Act](#). ”

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 the new [public health advice for the workplace](#) remains important in protecting people at higher risk and reducing cases of Covid in your overall workforce.

As charities supporting higher risk individuals, we have included below information that you may find useful and ask that you take a moment to reflect on it as it is likely your employees at higher risk may be feeling anxious and need additional support. We know that you will be keen to offer your support to allow everyone to work safely and get the best out of your workforce.

Individuals who may have reduced protection from vaccination

Studies¹ show 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 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

¹ [Octave Study](#)

individuals in this group will continue to have less vaccine protection and remain at higher risk from Covid.

The **Government advises** people at highest risk from Covid (previously called Clinically Extremely Vulnerable, now 'Enhanced protection group' numbering 1.3 million people) to follow guidance from their doctors on their ongoing risk. 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 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:

Anyone who tests positive for Covid should not come to work

- Although the legal requirement to self-isolate following a positive Covid test has ended, [Government guidance](#) recommends people who test positive for Covid should stay at home for 5 days and avoid contact with people at higher risk from Covid for 10 days. Employers will play an important role in facilitating this. This guidance protects employees who remain at higher risk and the workforce in general.

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, it is vital to maintain risk reducing measures and consider whether the individual is entitled to a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act in consultation with the employee and with medical advice where appropriate.

Safety best practice

- Emphasising to the [wider workforce](#) the importance of the shared responsibility to reduce everyone's risk from Covid, particularly those most at risk. Our recent research found limited levels of public awareness of the current guidance to protect people at higher risk² and reduce the spread of Covid reinforces the importance of this. Employers can play an important role in distributing this information to staff so that they can look after each other.
- [Ensuring good ventilation](#) is a key tool for reducing risk of Covid amongst employees.
- Keeping workplaces clean and supporting people to continue to wear facemasks if they choose to do so.

² Almost half (45%) of the public aren't aware they should avoid people at risk for an extended period if they have Covid. Over a third (37%) aren't aware they should work from home if they have tested positive for Covid. Almost a quarter (23%) aren't aware of any Government Covid advice

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 will provide important protection. Assessments for people with fluctuating health 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.
- [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](#).

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. The [Access to Work](#) scheme can give practical advice and guidance to employers, to help them understand physical and mental ill health and how they can support employees and may help with funding.

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 encourage discussion with the individual during the risk assessment process to inform decision making and get the best outcome for both parties.

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 mental health 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 hope that the information within this letter supports joint decision making. As charities, 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

anthonymolan.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-fags/

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/helpingpeoplereturntoworkaftershielding

Kidney Care UK

www.kidneycareuk.org/coronavirus

Kidney Research UK

[Coronavirus and kidney disease - Kidney Research UK](https://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/coronavirus)

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

sruk.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/