



You can get this letter in different languages or in a way that is easier for you to understand. To ask for this letter in a different way e-mail: Shielding@gov.wales

Advice – taking extra care as coronavirus levels increase.

You have received this letter because you are on the Shielding Patients List (SPL). Coronavirus levels are rising in communities in Wales and new restrictions are being put in place, so this letter gives you advice on how to keep yourself safe.

You do not need to re-start shielding, but you should take extra care and this letter tells you what you can do. You can show this information to your friends and family so that they can also behave in a way that keeps you safe. If my advice changes I will write to you again.

Why I am writing to you, but not advising you to shield

The Chief Medical Officers from across the UK continue to discuss the best way to support people who are most likely to have a poor outcome from the effects of Coronavirus. We know that shielding helped to make some people feel safer, but for many others there was a significant downside to the advice given, especially from the feelings of loneliness and isolation.

As we understand the impacts of coronavirus more fully now, we also know that many groups of people who are most likely to be very seriously ill or die are not covered by the medical conditions approach we took previously. This includes certain ethnic groups and those from our most deprived communities. We are looking to apply the learning from the last 6 months in any advice that we give to you, the wider public and Ministers.

In that time all of us have learned that a number of simple measures, as long as we follow them strictly, can help to keep us safe. Different rules are in place to ensure public spaces are COVID safe, and employers have worked hard to provide a safe working environment. This virus is likely to be part of our lives for some time yet and so I want to support you to live safely alongside it.

I recognise that this is a very worrying and challenging time for you and your family. I want to help you understand the choices you can make to minimise your own risk and also help you discuss with your family and friends how they can support you by following the same advice. The guidance here is not just for those who were shielding before – everybody can follow it to reduce their risk.

Choices you can make and action to take, to help reduce your risk

One of the changes as part of the national fire-break is that people can no longer meet with people from another house (known as extended households). This is because we know the virus is spreading through family groups and where social distancing is not being followed. I advise that you think about your family members or friends who you are in contact with and reduce contact as much as you can, even if these restrictions change after the fire-break period. If you do continue to have contact, you should keep 2 metres or 3 steps away. You should clean your hands and surfaces within your home regularly. Please remember anyone can catch this virus and anyone can spread it.

Please follow any rules very strictly. These rules are in place to reduce the spread of the virus and will help to reduce your risk. We have seen the virus spread where people have met outdoors (which is safer) but have then moved indoors because of the weather, or people have returned from holiday and have visited their family instead of self-isolating as required. **Protect yourself by following the rules.**

Sticking to the basics also remains the best way to protect yourself:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are not available
- Stay 2 metres or 3 steps away from people you do not live with inside or outside (where this is permitted).
- Clean surfaces regularly and avoid touching surfaces others have touched
- Keep contacts to a minimum
- Shop online or consider doing one big shop at quieter times of the day. Don't forget, you can still get priority access to supermarket delivery slots.

Flu vaccine

We expect to see COVID-19 and flu circulating at the same time this winter. Flu can be serious and people with a long term health condition or aged 65 or over are at increased risk. Having a flu vaccine every year is one of the best ways to protect yourself.

It is extremely important you have your flu vaccine this autumn. Your household contacts should also have a flu vaccine as that will help give you extra protection.

GP surgeries and community pharmacies have made sure it is safe for you and your household contacts to be vaccinated.

Ongoing support

Even though I have advised that you do not need to shield at the moment I want to reassure you that we are keeping a record of the people who were shielding, so we can contact you and update you if we need to. In case you do not feel comfortable going to the shops, your access to priority slots for supermarket deliveries remains in place.

The food box scheme ended when the advice to shield was paused and the National Volunteer Prescription Delivery Scheme ended on 30th September, but if you still need help with receiving your medicines please speak with your local pharmacy.

If you need support and you do not have anyone to help you, please speak with your local council. The contact details for each local council are at the end of this letter and they have a list of people in their local area who are in receipt of this letter.

If the advice changes for your area we will communicate with the public via local radio and television, and I will also write to you if I need to advise you to shield again. Please see below for an option to sign up for our trial text/email update service.

Children and shielding

We are learning more about coronavirus all the time and now know that children are unlikely to get very sick from the coronavirus, so in most cases do not need to shield.

If you were 18 or under on 16th August 2020 then your doctor has been asked to review your record to check if you need to remain on the Shielding Patients List. You will receive a letter telling you the outcome of this review. In some cases doctors may need to speak with you about this and will contact you directly. You will remain on the Shielding Patient List unless you are told you have been taken off it.

Receiving a letter like this for the first time

If you are receiving a letter like this for the first time, it is because your health record shows you have a serious health condition. This may put you at risk of severe illness if you catch coronavirus and so you have been added to the Shielding Patient List. If you have not been advised of this before, you may want to talk with your GP or hospital doctor. You should follow the guidance set out in this letter. You can find further advice on shielding at gov.wales/shielding



Welsh Government:

www.gov.wales/coronavirus

www.gov.wales/find-support-affected-coronavirus

Public Health Wales:

www.phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/



If you have a learning disability, and you need support to understand this letter please contact the **Wales Learning Disability Helpline:**



By e-mail: helpline.wales@mencap.org.uk



Or by phone: 0808 8000 300

The Wales Learning Disability Helpline is open everyday between 9am and 5pm. It is free to call.

NHS COVID-19 App

If you have a smartphone, please download and use the NHS Covid-19 App (launched on 24 September). The App will tell you the current COVID-19 risk level in the area in which you live. It will also allow you to keep a diary of places you have visited using a 'check in' function, and will alert you if you have spent time with another App user who has tested positive for coronavirus, so that you can take precautions or book a test if you develop symptoms. The App does not collect personal information, and all your data is securely protected. The more people who use the App, the more it will help us to work together to manage the spread of coronavirus. You can download the App by searching for 'COVID-19 App' on your smartphone.

Attending work and school

It is impossible to eliminate all risk, but there is a lot that employers can do to minimise the risk to their employees. In most cases you will have returned to work, if you are unable to work from home, when the advice to shield was paused in August and will have already discussed how to stay safe at work. Check that yourself and others in the workplace are following practices and processes that have been agreed and raise any concerns with your employer directly.

There is advice on the Welsh Government website at <https://gov.wales/workplace-guidance-employers-and-employees-covid19> and information on the Health and Safety Executive website with steps employers should be taking to make a workplace COVID secure.

For children, we now know that coronavirus does not usually make them very sick and the negative impact of not attending school is significant. If you are concerned about attending school then speak to the school or Local Authority to discuss how children are being kept safe.

If you develop symptoms of coronavirus

You will need to self-isolate if you develop one of the following symptoms:

- a new continuous cough
- a high temperature
- loss of or change to sense of smell or taste

You should also apply for a test online if you develop one of these symptoms. This can be done on the NHS website at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>. Please do not visit your GP surgery or hospital to request a test, as you may infect others.

The test is only effective for those who are experiencing coronavirus symptoms and needs to be taken in the first 5 days of having symptoms. It only checks if you have coronavirus right now and not if you have already had the virus.

Support with daily living

Please discuss any ongoing needs you have with your carers, family, friends, neighbours or local community groups to see how they can support you. If you do not have anyone who can help you, please contact your local council. The contact details for each local council are at the end of this letter.

If you are struggling to keep your home warm or cope with your energy bills the Nest scheme offers a range of free, impartial advice and, if you are eligible, a package of free home energy efficiency improvements such as a new boiler, central heating or insulation. This can lower your energy bills and benefit your health and wellbeing. You can find more information at www.nest.gov.wales or call 0808 808 2244.

If you do not have enough money to pay your bills, it is important to seek help and to do this as early as possible. Call Citizen's Advice free on 03444 77 20 20 or visit the Citizens Advice website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

If you need help from the welfare system, you can also visit: www.gov.uk/universal-credit or call the Universal Credit Helpline on 0800 328 5644 (0800 328 1744 for Welsh language).

You can also apply online for the Welsh Government's Discretionary Assistance Fund payment at: www.gov.wales/discretionary-assistance-fund-daf/how-apply or by calling free on 0800 859 5924.

If you feel that you have been treated unfairly by your employer, or somebody who gives you a service, then the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) offers a free advice service which you can access by calling 0808 800 0082, by text phone on 0808 800 0084 or by visiting their website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

If you have concerns about your health and safety at work, you can raise them with any union safety representatives, or ultimately with the organisation responsible for enforcement in your workplace, either the Health and Safety Executive, at www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm, or your local authority.

Looking after your wellbeing

Information about staying well is available at the Public Health Wales website:

www.phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/how-are-you-doing/

A leaflet is also included with this letter to highlight sources of support if you are feeling down or anxious.

Older people, their family, friends, carers, or professionals can also contact Age Cymru's Advice Line on 08000 223 444

You can contact your local council to discuss what other help is available in your area from voluntary and community organisations. Please also discuss any concerns with your GP.

Use of data

Electronic patient data held by GPs and hospitals was used to identify people most at risk of serious illness caused by Covid-19. We used this data to write to you to provide you with advice and guidance on how to protect yourself. Information about you, which did not include medical information, was shared with Welsh Government so that it could ensure essential support was put in place.

Welsh Government shared that data with local authorities, water companies, community pharmacies and supermarkets so that they could provide essential support, including prioritised access to food and medication deliveries where needed.

During the outbreak we will keep your contact details in case we need to contact you again. We are continually reviewing whether our partners need the data that has been provided and will ensure that it is returned to us or securely destroyed when we have determined it is no longer needed. You can find a copy of our Covid-19 Privacy Statement on this link

www.gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-supporting-vulnerable-people-privacy-statement-html

Your local council's contact details

<u>Blaenau Gwent CBC</u>	01495 311556	www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
<u>Bridgend CBC</u>	01656 643643	www.bridgend.gov.uk
<u>Caerphilly CBC</u>	01443 811490	www.caerphilly.gov.uk
<u>Carmarthenshire CC</u>	01267 234567	www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk
<u>Ceredigion CC</u>	01545 570881	www.ceredigion.gov.uk
<u>City & County of Swansea</u>	01792 636363	www.swansea.gov.uk
<u>City of Cardiff Council</u>	029 2087 1071	www.cardiff.gov.uk
<u>Conwy CBC</u>	01492 575544	www.conwy.gov.uk
<u>Denbighshire CC</u>	01824 706000 Out of Hours: 0300 123 30 68	www.denbighshire.gov.uk
<u>Flintshire CC</u>	01352 752121	www.flintshire.gov.uk
<u>Gwynedd Council</u>	01766 771000	www.gwynedd.gov.uk
<u>Isle of Anglesey Council</u>	01248 750057	www.anglesey.gov.uk
<u>Merthyr Tydfil Council</u>	01685 725000	www.merthyr.gov.uk
<u>Monmouthshire Council</u>	01633 644644	www.monmouthshire.gov.uk
<u>Neath Port Talbot Council</u>	01639 686868	www.npt.gov.uk
<u>Newport City Council</u>	01633 656656	www.newport.gov.uk
<u>Pembrokeshire CC</u>	01437 776301	www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk
<u>Powys County Council</u>	01597 827460	www.powys.gov.uk
<u>Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC</u>	01443 425020	www.rctcbc.gov.uk
<u>Torfaen CBC</u>	01495 762200	www.torfaen.gov.uk
<u>Vale of Glamorgan Council</u>	01446 729592	www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk
<u>Wrexham CBC</u>	01978 292000	www.wrexham.gov.uk