

Dear colleagues,

## **SHIELDING NHS STAFF**

### Updated Advice for Shielding Cohort

1. Those on the shielding list received a letter from the CMO in March updating advice including on going to work.
2. If the area that an individual lives or works in moves into Level 4, then it is advised that they do not go into the workplace and either work from home or be paid for as if at work. There may be circumstances whereby an individual may live or work in a Level 4 area and still attend work, subject to local agreement between the individual and the employer.
3. The letter from the CMO will serve a similar purpose to a fit note for those in Level 4 areas. A separate fit note from a GP is not required. This applies until June 2021.
4. The remainder of this letter concerns the lifting of shielding on 26 April when the area an individual lives and works in is in Level 3.
5. The advice on returning to work applies regardless of whether or not the individual has been vaccinated.
6. Those on the shielding list should continue to follow the extra advice aligned to the Protection Levels at: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): shielding advice and support - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Coronavirus/COVID-19/shielding-advice-and-support)

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### **Addresses**

#### For Action

Chairs, NHS Boards and National Health Boards  
Chief Executives, NHS Boards and National Health Boards  
Directors of Human Resources, NHS Boards and National Health Boards  
Medical Directors  
Employee Directors

#### For Information

Council of Deans for Health Scotland  
Medical and Dental Schools  
Directors of Dentistry NHS Boards  
Nursing Directors  
Public Health Directors

### **Enquiries to:**

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### Advice for Returning to Work

7. NHS Boards should now be considering making arrangements for the return of the shielding workforce. We expect employers to have a refreshed conversation with individuals about what controls are in place to keep them safe at work.
8. We advise continuing to use the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on individual occupational risk assessment - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/occupational-health-guidance-on-individual-occupational-risk-assessment-2020/pages/1-1-introduction.aspx). This was developed with NHS Occupational Health Consultants and was first published in July 2020 for when shielding was lifted in August 2020 to enable an individualised approach to risk assessment.
9. An updated version was published on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021 and should be used by individuals and managers to have a refreshed conversation about returning to the workplace. An agreement should be reached between the individual and manager about how they can return to work taking into account the workplace risks and control measures in place, an individual's clinical risk to COVID-19, and the local prevalence of the virus.
10. For many staff, no changes to working arrangements will be required from when they returned to work in August, due to the extensive layers of protection in place to keep all staff safe. Following a risk assessment, the individual may still be encouraged to work from home, or alternative working arrangements, such as non-patient facing roles may be considered to reduce risks and anxieties for those returning from shielding.
11. If an agreement cannot be reached between the individual and their manager then the individual should not return to work until the risk has been fully explored and further advice sought through local HR. Occupational Health Services (OHS) advice may also be required depending on the individual circumstances.
12. If there is a dispute about the ability of an individual to return to work, we expect Boards to resolve this using established policy and process and through seeking advice from OHS.

### Additional Considerations

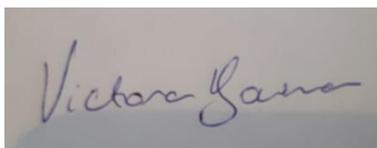
13. We recognise that many staff will feel anxious about returning to the workplace. Individuals should be signposted to wellbeing support that they can access. This may be signposting to local support services, or via

the National Wellbeing Hub and National Wellbeing Helpline that provides a 24/7 service for those who need further psychological support.

14. There will have been changes to the Infection, Prevent and Control (IPC) guidance since the shielding cohort were in the workplace. We would advise signposting to the appropriate IPC Manual, which includes information about PPE provision, and can be found here: [National Infection Prevention and Control Manual: Scottish COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control Addendum for Acute Settings](#)
15. Whilst we expect those on the shielding cohort to have received their first dose of the vaccination, there may be some individuals who have not yet had their vaccine. Please encourage staff, if there's no medical reason why they shouldn't, to visit [Missing appointments | The coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccine \(nhsinform.scot\)](#) or call the free COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline on 0800 030 8013 (open daily, 8am to 8pm) to arrange their vaccine.
16. Twice-weekly Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing is now in place for all healthcare workers employed by NHS Scotland that are regularly in the workplace. It also applies to patient-facing staff in primary care independent contractors - general practice, dentistry, optometry and pharmacy. We expect those who have been shielding and are returning to the workforce to be offered LFD tests. If they are unsure how to arrange this, please discuss with the local LFD lead. If applicable, weekly PCR testing should also be reinstated. There is more information about asymptomatic staff testing here: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): asymptomatic staff testing in NHS Scotland - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
17. Staff who are on the shielding list should continue to access annual leave as per standard arrangements.

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Bowman



Deputy Director of Health Workforce

