

House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS291)

Department of Health and Social Care

Written Statement made by: **Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care) (Jo Churchill)** on 15 Sep 2021.

COVID-19 Update

Shielding was introduced at the start of the pandemic as one of the few interventions available to support those who, at the time, were considered clinically extremely vulnerable.

We know shielding advice is extremely restrictive and has a significant impact on people's lives and their mental and physical wellbeing. It was right to take this step to protect the most vulnerable during the initial waves of the virus, and we put in place support for those who were advised to shield to help them to do so.

We now know much more about the virus and what makes someone more or less vulnerable to COVID-19. We are also in a different situation than we were at the beginning of the pandemic. The vaccine continues to be successfully rolled out, with millions of people having received both doses and a booster programme about to commence. We also have proven, effective treatments, such as dexamethasone and tocilizumab, to support improved outcomes in clinical care pathways.

We have not advised people to shield since 1 April. Since 19 July, the guidance for clinically extremely vulnerable people has been to follow the same advice as everyone else, with the suggestion of additional precautions people may wish to take. Those patients who are at risk from infectious diseases more generally and who can also remain less protected after other vaccinations may wish to discuss this with their specialist as part of their routine care.

Due to the success of the vaccine rollout, improvements in treatment and clinical care, and growing understanding of the virus, the government has accepted expert clinical advice and decided to end the shielding programme and the requirement for centralised guidance for people who were considered clinically extremely vulnerable.

This moves us towards the situation pre-Covid where individuals managed their own conditions with their health professionals. We believe this is a proportionate decision based on the success of the vaccine programme and the protection it offers, the availability of effective treatments and the highly restrictive impact of shielding on people's mental health and wellbeing.