

Q&A - for patients

I've just received a letter telling me I need to shield – it's the first I've had. What should I do?

People with certain conditions are considered to be at high risk, or 'Clinically Extremely Vulnerable', to the health risks posed by COVID-19. As a result, they are advised to shield at home. [More information is available here](#); shielding people should stay home and avoid contact with anyone outside their bubble if at all possible. Many people received letters about this back in the spring of 2020 and have had ongoing updates.

Based on evidence, more people are now known to be at high risk from COVID-19, so more people are now receiving these letters. Shielding can be hard, so support is available – there's information in the link above. People who are shielding are also a priority group for the COVID-19 vaccine: you should shortly hear from your GP to make an appointment, but you can go ahead and book a vaccination through the national booking system by visiting www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination or by calling 119 if you don't have the internet.

I have a long term health condition, and I've heard that this means I get the vaccine next. Is this true?

People with some long-term health conditions, or those receiving some treatments, are known as 'clinically at risk', which means they have a higher risk of being seriously ill if they catch COVID-19. Please note that these conditions are different (and generally less severe) than the list of conditions that require people who are 'clinically extremely vulnerable' to shield. If you are in this clinically at risk category and have not yet had the vaccine you will be invited to get your first jab from now onwards. We will contact you to have this done at a local GP-led vaccination centre.

Please note that the list of conditions is tightly defined: it isn't a question of how unwell you are, or how your condition affects you, but only how much risk of serious illness from COVID-19 your condition puts you in. The conditions included in this list is set nationally, by the joint committee on vaccinations and immunisations (JCVI) and your GP has very little discretion in terms of which patients will come under this category. We have to follow this JCVI guidance when we vaccinate our patients and cannot move you onto the list of people with underlying health conditions unless there has been a mistake in your medical records.

The summary list of conditions is:

- chronic respiratory disease, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cystic fibrosis and severe asthma
- chronic heart disease (and vascular disease)
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease
- chronic neurological disease including epilepsy

- Down's syndrome
- severe and profound learning disability
- diabetes
- solid organ, bone marrow and stem cell transplant recipients
- people with specific cancers
- immunosuppression due to disease or treatment
- asplenia and splenic dysfunction
- morbid obesity
- severe mental illness

I care for a relative – can I get the vaccination?

If you are aged 16 and over and support an adult who is at high risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 and with whom you have close personal or face to face contact, you should now get your vaccination. Carers of children are not included in this phase, apart from Carers of children who have serious neuro-disabilities and other complications.

You don't need to wait to be contacted if you are registered to receive a Carer's Allowance.. You can book an appointment **now** via the national booking service www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination.

The national booking service allows you to arrange an appointment at a vaccination centre or community pharmacy-led service. Call 119 if you don't have the internet. You can choose a time slot and location that suits you.

If it isn't possible for you to attend any of the vaccination centres offered through the national booking service, then wait for us to contact you, and we will offer you an appointment at our GP-led vaccination centre instead.

If you do not receive Carer's Allowance, but you are registered with us at your GP practice as an unpaid carer, we will contact you to arrange your vaccination.

If you consider that you are a Carer for someone who is at high risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 and with whom you have close personal or face to face contact, but you do not receive Carers Allowance and are not known to your GP as a Carer, please contact us at confidential.vinehouse@nhs.net or call us on 01923 262363 after 2.00 pm to speak to our Carers Champion. If she is not available we will take your details and ask her to call you back.

The NHS is working closely with social care services colleagues and organisations that represent Carers to put in place arrangements to offer the vaccine as soon as possible to other Carers who will be eligible to receive a vaccine but don't meet the current criteria in terms of the two categories mentioned above. For example, if you are known to be a Carer by social services or Carers in Herts, you will be contacted directly by the NHS in the coming weeks. For other Carers who are not known by social services or other organisations, we will provide information for you and share this as widely as possible – do look out for more information.

I had my first vaccination in January at my GP-led vaccination centre but don't have my second date yet. Who should I call?

Please don't call anyone. You will be invited back to the same place you went to receive your first dose, about 12 weeks after you had the first jab. About three quarters of people vaccinated so far had their first jab at a GP-run clinic, and those sites have recently received dates for when they will receive their second dose supplies. They will be arranging dates for the second dose clinics, and will be in touch nearer the time.

Remember that you aren't fully vaccinated until after the second dose. Getting the second jab is as important as getting the first.