



**COVID-19: BCCA updated guidance for patients, parents, charities and support groups: Returning to work and education, 2 September 2020**

**Introduction:**

Exiting the period of lockdown can be a worrying time for patients of all ages who are living with congenital heart disease, particularly for those clinically extremely vulnerable patients who have been “shielding” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now that the levels of COVID-19 in the community have fallen, government advice in all parts of the UK is that shielding is no longer necessary so that clinically extremely vulnerable patients can return to education or to work. The advantages of returning to work or education extends beyond the educational and financial implications and includes social interaction, prevention of isolation and mental and physical wellbeing.

**Guidance:**

Patients with congenital heart disease should continue to follow government advice with regards to COVID-19 including advice about returning to work and school.

Detailed information on return to school and work has been published for each of the nations of the UK. This includes advice for those who are clinically extremely vulnerable (those who have been shielding) which include some adults and children with congenital heart disease. If you are clinically extremely vulnerable you should have received a letter confirming this or have been told directly by your GP or hospital clinician.

This advice is that those in the clinically extremely vulnerable group no longer need to follow previous shielding advice. Guidance advises attending school and returning to work for this group of patients as the remainder of the population. Details of each nation’s arrangements and associated precautions are found at the links below.

While patients who have been shielding can return to work and to education, they should continue to follow the advice on social distancing, hand washing, cleaning and should try to keep overall social interactions low.

If there are further national or local outbreaks of the virus, and further restrictions are needed, the government, or local authority may advise clinically extremely vulnerable people to resume shielding. This will be determined by local circumstances and will not always apply when further restrictions are brought in.

## **Adults with congenital heart disease returning to work**

Adult patients who have been shielding can return to work provided the workplace is [covid-secure](#). Working from home remains encouraged where possible. You may be able to take up an alternative role or change your working patterns temporarily.

If you need support to work at home or in the workplace, [you can apply for Access to Work](#).

Access to Work will provide support for the disability-related extra costs of working that are beyond standard reasonable adjustments an employer must provide.

Helpful links:

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/news/coronavirus-and-your-health/work-and-coronavirus>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/protect-people.htm>

<https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus/vulnerable-people-and-high-risk>

## **Children and adolescents with CHD returning to school / further education**

Children who have been shielding should attend schools in keeping with the wider guidance on reopening of schools.

Helpful links:

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-talking-children-families-about-returning-school-guiding-principles>

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/news/coronavirus-and-your-health/coronavirus-and-going-back-to-school#Heading2>

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-shielding-guidance-children-young-people#children-who-should-be-advised-to-shield>

## **Government guidance**

*Guidance for England:*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home>

*Guidance for Wales:*

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-08/operational-guidance-for-schools-and-settings-from-the-autumn-term-version-2.pdf>

<https://gov.wales/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-people-defined-on-medical-grounds-as-extremely-vulnerable-from-coronavirus-covid-19-html>

*Guidance for Scotland:*

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-preparing-start-new-school-term-august-2020/pages/2/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/>

*Guidance for Northern Ireland:*

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/NorthernIrelandReOpeningSchoolsGuidanceNewSchoolDayVersion213August2020.pdf>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-pausing-shielding-extremely-vulnerable-people>

## **Related guidance**

### *Immunisations*

Although there is, understandably, a focus on COVID-19 at present it is essential that patients keep up to date with relevant immunisations, particularly Influenza as we enter the winter months.

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/support/practical-support/seasonal-influenza>

### *Cardiac Procedures*

Patients who are coming into hospital for cardiac procedures will be specifically advised about isolation and / or COVID-19 testing precautions. Be sure to ask about such precautions when you are contacted.

**Patients and parents should be aware that the guidelines may change depending on how the COVID-19 pandemic progresses. There may be further local or national lockdowns or other changes to advice.**

BCCA, 2 September 2020