

Dear

## **Update to the advice to clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) people**

You are receiving this letter because you have been identified as being Clinically Extremely Vulnerable in relation to Covid-19.

The purpose of this letter is to tell you that it is necessary to change the advice to CEV people in relation to attending the workplace.

Since shielding for CEV people was paused on 31 July 2020 our understanding of Covid-19 has increased and a number of important changes have taken place in the approach to managing COVID-19, to reduce its transmission. These include a greater awareness of the importance of social distancing, the requirement to use face coverings, COVID secure workplaces and greater adherence to respiratory and hand hygiene. We also have a greater appreciation of the impact of shielding on many people's physical and mental well-being.

As you will be aware, a new variant of Covid-19 has been identified which is more transmissible than the one that has been prevalent. This, coupled with the pressures that are currently being experienced in HSC services, means that there is a heightened level of risk in Northern Ireland in relation to Covid-19.

For that reason, the Northern Ireland Executive has recently agreed to put additional restrictions in place to help limit the spread of the virus, details of which are available at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you>. These restrictions, in addition to the general guidance that is in place in relation to household mixing, travel, wearing of face coverings and hand hygiene, mean that CEV people will be protected from exposure to Covid-19 across a wide range of settings.

However, in addition to these restrictions, I have concluded that further advice for CEV people attending the workplace is necessary.

Previously, the advice to CEV people has been that you should work from home if possible, but that it is safe to attend work if proper measures to ensure social distancing are in operation in the workplace.

As part of our approach to managing the current wave of the pandemic, from 26 December CEV people who are working and are unable to do so from home are advised not to attend the workplace.

I would emphasise that this is advice only. People are free to make their own judgements about whether or not they should attend work, depending on the Covid-security of their working environment. However, the general restrictions which apply to everyone must be followed <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you>.

Anyone who cannot attend work due to this advice will be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay, as was the case when shielding was introduced at the start of the pandemic. This letter is evidence for your employer, and you do not need to get a fit note from your GP. If you need help from the benefit system please visit <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>.

I would stress that this is not a return to shielding as we knew it and I am not advising you to remain indoors. I would encourage you to go outside for exercise, provided you observe social distancing when you do so. The current Regulations and guidance in relation to households mixing and bubbling, will still apply for CEV people <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you#toc-2>.

This advice applies to clinically extremely vulnerable individuals only. Others living in a household with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable are not advised to follow it, but should continue to stringently follow the guidance on social distancing, face coverings and hand hygiene.

This advice will be in place for six weeks initially, with a review after four weeks in line with the review of restrictions more generally.

If you are worried about this change in advice, there is a range of supports available which can help.

You can contact the Covid-19 Community Helpline for advice by phone, email or text message on:

Telephone: 0808 802 0020

Email: [covid19@adviceni.net](mailto:covid19@adviceni.net)

Text: ACTION to 81025.

The Helpline is local to Northern Ireland and is managed by AdviceNI. The AdviceNI website also contains a range of information which may be of help [www.adviceni.net](http://www.adviceni.net).

The Minding Your Head website <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-taking-care-your-mental-health-and-wellbeing> contains information to help you look after your own mental health and to support others.

In addition, tailored information and self-help guides from local mental health and wellbeing charities are available at the Covid-19 Virtual Wellbeing Hub <https://covidwellbeingni.info>.

Up to date information on the advice to CEV people is available at <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-clinically-extremely-vulnerable-and-vulnerable-people>. You should refer to this webpage any time the restrictions and guidance to the general public changes, to make sure you have access to the correct, up to date information on the advice you should follow.

You should retain this letter in a safe place should you need it again at any time in the future to remind employers of your CEV status.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your continued strength, patience and forbearance in our continued battle against the Covid-19 virus.

Yours sincerely

**DR MICHAEL McBRIDE**  
**Chief Medical Officer**