

Dear Employer

We would like to thank you, as an employer, for your work in supporting staff at higher risk of severe illness and death from Covid-19 throughout the pandemic.

It is welcome news that Covid-19 restrictions have started to ease. However, we want to highlight the ongoing importance of Covid-safe measures to those of your staff who may be at higher risk and, importantly, people who are likely to have reduced protection from the vaccine.

### **Individuals who may have reduced protection from vaccination**

Although the vaccine rollout has been a great success, there is developing scientific evidence that the current Covid-19 vaccines give much less protection to certain individuals, particularly those with a weakened immune response due to a specific health condition or because they receive certain treatments.

We ask you to take into account any such potential reduced protection from the vaccine in individualised risk assessments and resulting adjustments for your staff.

There is no way currently to accurately measure the level of protection the vaccine has provided an individual, although people with underlying health conditions might choose to discuss their likely response to the vaccine with their doctor. We — as patient organisations — provide Covid-19 vaccine information on our websites, which we keep updated with the latest information, including on vaccine efficacy. We invite you to make maximum use of these resources, and to signpost them to your staff. We hope that these resources will be useful to you in underpinning joint decision making about working arrangements.

### **Keeping your workforce safe**

Many people living with health conditions have told us they are worried that their needs will be forgotten as the general population return to something more like normal life.

We are very keen to support you as employers so that people who remain more vulnerable to Covid-19 are reassured their continuing risks are acknowledged and addressed. There is useful guidance on supporting people who may be more at risk from Covid-19 within the wider [HSE guidance](#). Key points include:

#### Risk assessments

- Comprehensive and individualised [risk assessments](#), informed by medical advice where appropriate, which are monitored and adjusted in light of changes such as fluctuating local prevalence, new variants of concern and data about vaccine protection. The [Covid-age calculator](#) is a helpful tool for risk assessments that takes into account health conditions and other factors to estimate vulnerability.

#### Safety best practice

- Emphasising to the [wider workforce](#) the importance of continuing to stringently apply Covid-19 safety measures
- Supporting regular lateral flow testing for the virus to keep everyone protected.
- Ensuring [good ventilation](#) throughout the workplace.

### Reasonable adjustments

- Discussing and implementing reasonable adjustments such as flexible start times to avoid peak time travel on public transport, or moving away from public facing roles. Funding may be available from [Access to Work](#) scheme.
- People at highest risk from Covid-19 are advised to continue working from home where possible, including after both vaccinations, and there is [HSE advice](#) on taking every possible step to help them do so, including altering a role's responsibilities. You could also consider using the [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) to furlough any of your clinically extremely vulnerable workers who cannot work from home, which is available until September 2021.

People are keen to get back to their usual activities but to be safe while doing so. Individuals will have different views on what feels right for them, and some of your staff may have very legitimate concerns about their own ongoing risks from Covid-19. We hope this will be discussed during the risk assessment process and have significant bearing on decision making.

### **Mental wellbeing support**

We would also like to underline the potential mental health needs of staff at higher risk. Living with the threat of serious illness or death should they contract Covid-19 and in many cases shielding for a year has placed a huge toll on the mental health of individuals more at risk from the virus. Our websites provide links to support for people affected by long term conditions and once again we encourage you to signpost your staff to these as relevant; they are included at the bottom of the letter.

We recognise the huge amount of work done by employers throughout the pandemic and would like to thank you again for the ongoing support made available to vulnerable staff and their families.

As we move on to the next stage of the pandemic we are ready and willing to provide any support, guidance and information that may be helpful as you continue to support your workforce through what has been an extraordinarily challenging time.

Yours faithfully,

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director, Age UK  
Catherine Woodhead, Chief Executive Officer, Muscular Dystrophy UK  
Charlotte Augst, Chief Executive, National Voices  
Chris Askew, Chief Executive, Diabetes UK  
Clare Jacklin, Chief Executive, National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society  
Dr Susan Walsh, Chief Executive, Immunodeficiency UK  
Ellen Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Versus Arthritis  
Gemma Peters, Chief Executive, Blood Cancer UK  
Genevieve Edwards, Chief Executive Officer, Bowel Cancer UK  
John Mills, Chair, Vasculitis UK  
Kim Chaplain, Associate Director for Work at the Centre for Ageing Better  
Nick Moberly, Chief Executive, MS Society  
Paul Bristow, Chief Executive, Kidney Care UK  
Paul Howard, Chief Executive, Lupus UK

Rebecca Cosgriff, Director of Data and Quality Improvement, Cystic Fibrosis Trust  
Sarah Sleet, Chief Executive, Crohn's & Colitis UK  
Sue Brown, Chief Executive, Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance  
Sue Farrington, Chief Executive, Scleroderma and Raynaud's UK

**Covid-19 information:**

**Age UK**

[ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus/](https://ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/coronavirus/)

**Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance**

[arma.uk.net/covid-19-coronavirus-info/](https://arma.uk.net/covid-19-coronavirus-info/)

**Blood Cancer UK**

[bloodcancer.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus-covid-19/](https://bloodcancer.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus-covid-19/)

**Bowel Cancer UK**

[bowelcanceruk.org.uk/news-and-blogs/coronavirus-faqs/](https://bowelcanceruk.org.uk/news-and-blogs/coronavirus-faqs/)

**Crohn's and Colitis UK**

[crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/support/coronavirus](https://crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/support/coronavirus)

[noteverydisabilityisvisible.org.uk/](https://noteverydisabilityisvisible.org.uk/)

**Cystic Fibrosis UK**

[cysticfibrosis.org.uk/life-with-cystic-fibrosis/coronavirus](https://cysticfibrosis.org.uk/life-with-cystic-fibrosis/coronavirus)

**Diabetes UK**

[diabetes.org.uk/about\\_us/news/coronavirus](https://diabetes.org.uk/about_us/news/coronavirus)

**Immunodeficiency UK**

[www.immunodeficiencyuk.org](https://www.immunodeficiencyuk.org)

[immunodeficiencyuk.org/livingwithimmunodeficiency/affectedadultswithpids/helpingpeoplereturntoworkaftershielding](https://immunodeficiencyuk.org/livingwithimmunodeficiency/affectedadultswithpids/helpingpeoplereturntoworkaftershielding)

**Kidney Care UK**

[www.kidneycareuk.org/coronavirus](https://www.kidneycareuk.org/coronavirus)

**Lupus UK**

[Lupusuk.org.uk/coronavirus/](https://Lupusuk.org.uk/coronavirus/)

**MS Society**

[mssociety.org.uk/care-and-support/ms-and-coronavirus-care-and-support](https://mssociety.org.uk/care-and-support/ms-and-coronavirus-care-and-support)

**Muscular Dystrophy UK**

[muscular dystrophyuk.org/get-the-right-care-and-support/coronavirus-information-and-advice-for-people-with-muscle-wasting-conditions/](https://muscular dystrophyuk.org/get-the-right-care-and-support/coronavirus-information-and-advice-for-people-with-muscle-wasting-conditions/)

**National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society**

[nras.org.uk/information-support/information/coronavirus-and-ra/](https://nras.org.uk/information-support/information/coronavirus-and-ra/)

[www.nras.org.uk/resource/work/](https://www.nras.org.uk/resource/work/)

**Scleroderma and Raynaud's UK**

[sruk.co.uk/find-support/coronavirus/](https://sruk.co.uk/find-support/coronavirus/)

**Versus Arthritis**

[www.versusarthritis.org/covid-19-updates/covid-19-employment-and-work-information/](https://www.versusarthritis.org/covid-19-updates/covid-19-employment-and-work-information/)

**Vasculitis UK**

[vasculitis.org.uk/news/coronavirus-covid-19](https://vasculitis.org.uk/news/coronavirus-covid-19)