

What is the difference between Social Distancing, Self-Isolating, & Shielding?

The above terms have caused confusion for many. The Health Influencing team have put together this briefing to help the Age UK network feel clear about the guidance for different groups of people, and how to direct someone to the most appropriate guidance.

But things are rarely simple so do contact us if you have any questions

HealthInfluencing@ageuk.org.uk



Social Distancing

[Government Guidance Here](#) & [FAQs Here](#)

Everyone should be social distancing, this means:

- only leaving the house for essential reasons (essential shopping, health reasons exercise, to provide care to others)
- Maintaining hand hygiene and catching coughs and sneezes in a tissue which is then disposed of
- Maintaining a distance of 2 metres from people outside of your household

These measures are **mandatory for everyone** in the population. Most older people are being asked to follow the same advice as everyone else, so it is within government guidelines to go outside for the essential reasons (exercise, shopping, providing care etc.)

Nonetheless many older people are very worried about the contracting the virus and are at greater risk of becoming seriously unwell if they do. They may wish or have been advised to take additional steps. Government advice continues to encourage 'stringent' adherence for those in vulnerable (but not shielded) groups.

Age UK advice:

- People aged 70 or over, or under the age of 70 with pre-existing health conditions, are at an increased risk if they contract coronavirus. They should consider taking additional precautions.
- People may want to think about exercising indoors rather than outdoors, and asking friends, neighbours or family to run errands rather than going out themselves.
- People should be vigilant about maintaining hygiene and be unafraid to ask anyone coming into their home (e.g. to provide essential help and support) to do the same.
 - Staying at home includes use of a garden, backyard or balcony. If these, or spaces such as laundry rooms, are communal (other people use them), everyone using them should adhere to social distancing
- Avoid close contact with any member of their household experiencing symptoms
- However, people should be encouraged to seek medical help if they need it for any reason and to make sure they are ok for essentials such as food and medicine. They should be reassured that it's still ok to go out when the need to.



Self-Isolating

[Government Guidance Here](#)

Be aware – some people may say they are 'self-isolating' but actually be referring to Shielding.

If anyone has symptoms such as a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they should self-isolate for a short period of time. This means do not leave the house for any reason and try to remain separate from the rest of the household as far as possible.

The BBC website has quite a helpful [page on self-isolating](#):

- If you live alone, you must stay at home for seven days from the day symptoms start
- If you, or someone you live with, develop symptoms, **the entire household needs to isolate for 14 days** to monitor for signs of Covid-19

- If someone else does become ill during that period, their seven-day isolation starts that day. For example, it might run from day three to day 10 - when that person's isolation would then end. It would not restart if another member of the household fell ill
- But, anyone who fell ill on day 13 would have to start a separate seven-day isolation from that day (meaning they would spend a total of 20 days at home)

Questions you can ask to help find out if someone is self-isolating:

1. Are they staying home, and not leaving the house at all, because they have one or more symptoms of coronavirus?
2. Are they staying home for a limited period of time (7-14 days)?

Remember, that if someone is extremely vulnerable **and** develops **any** symptoms of the coronavirus, they should call 111 immediately for further advice



Shielding

[Government Guidance here](#)

Some people have been identified as 'extremely vulnerable' and have been advised to shield for at least 12 weeks – this means not leaving the house at all for any reason and avoiding face-to-face contact with members of their own household and others.

Although there are a number of groups who are more likely to get seriously unwell if they catch the virus, shielding has only been recommended for a small group of people – approximately 1.5 million – who are at the very highest risk.

These categories have been set by the Chief Medical Officer and are **not** based on age, although many older people will fall within it. These are primarily people who either:

- Have a condition and/or are undergoing treatment that seriously compromises their immune system and how it functions – such as people undergoing certain types of cancer treatments, or:
- Have a particularly severe heart or lung conditions.

The NHS/GP/clinician should have contacted everyone who is considered “extremely vulnerable” so they can receive the guidance and support they need.

You can see the full list of health conditions [here](#) and on the [Age UK website](#).

NHS England have produced [this Q and A document](#) which may be able to answer some of your questions too.

Given that complete shielding for an extended period is such a very big and challenging ask, the Chief Medical Officer has only issued the current advice for older people where the evidence suggest it's absolutely necessary.

Be aware - sometimes people will also refer to this as self-isolating but it is important to be clear about the distinction. Self-isolating is for a short period due to a suspected coronavirus infection, while Shielding is longer term and intended to protect the most vulnerable from becoming infected with coronavirus.

Some important things to note about shielding:

- Shielding is a much bigger and more difficult ask – the period has been set for 12 weeks initially and this may be extended if research indicates this is considered necessary.
- It is only advice and people can choose not to do it if they wish, unlike self-isolating for symptoms.
- The medical advice on what to do if you become unwell is different to that of the wider population.
- We also know that some older people are very concerned, or even angry, about the fact they are not in the shielded group. However, these are particularly severe and restrictive measures for a small group – it means being unable to do things that are also important for maintaining health and wellbeing such as getting exercise or socialising with members of your own household.

Questions you can ask to help find out if someone is in the target for Shielding:

1. Have they received a letter from their GP or the NHS which specifically states that they are 'extremely vulnerable' and advises them to shield for 12 weeks?
2. Do they have one of the health conditions, or are they undergoing one of the treatments listed [here](#)?
3. Have they been explicitly advised by their GP or clinician to shield for 12 weeks?

Remember, that if someone is extremely vulnerable **and** develops **any** symptoms of the coronavirus, they should call 111 immediately for further advice

When to contact 111:

| Measures | When should you contact 111? |
|-------------------|--|
| Social Distancing | If you are well you do not need to contact 111 |
| Self-isolating | If coronavirus symptoms become unmanageable at home, get worse, or do not improve after 7 days |
| Shielding | Contact 111 immediately if you develop a high temperature or a new, continuous cough |