



You can get this letter in different languages or in a way that is easier for you to understand. To ask for this letter in a different way e-mail: Shielding@gov.wales

Please keep this letter in a safe place.

Updates for people on the Shielding Patient List

You have received this letter because you are on the Shielding Patient List. This is a list of people who are clinically extremely vulnerable to serious illness if they catch coronavirus.

We are now in winter and facing a new fast-moving form of coronavirus, called omicron. I wanted to write to you to give you some important updates about how to stay safe and protect yourself.

This letter includes information about omicron and also provides the latest advice about vaccination, testing and new treatments, which are available to people who are at the very highest risk of serious illness if they test positive for Covid-19.

I know many people will be worried about what they are hearing on the news and the information about the new omicron variant of coronavirus. I have included details about help and support, which is available for your mental health and well-being at the end of this letter. Please reach out if you need help.

Omicron variant

This new form of coronavirus – called the omicron variant – was identified in South Africa at the end of November. It has quickly travelled around the world.

We are still learning more about this variant but we do know it can quickly infect a lot of people by moving from person to person more easily than other forms of the virus.

We also know that two doses of the vaccine are not enough – having a booster dose of the Covid-19 vaccine is important to increase our protection against this form of the virus.

We do not know if this will cause a more serious form of illness but because it can infect a lot of people very quickly, this could mean a lot of people may need hospital care.

But we do know that following the protective measures which have kept us safe through the pandemic so far, will help us now and will help to reduce its spread. These include washing

your hands regularly, wearing a face covering; taking a lateral flow test before going to busy places or visiting friends and family and keeping indoor spaces ventilated – such as keeping windows open if you can).

Please follow these measures to protect yourself and people around you.

Having your booster vaccine is one of the most important things you can do.

If you are on any medication which suppresses your immune system, I am advising you to take extra care and to follow the advice of your GP or clinician. When your immune system is suppressed, even for a short period of time, it is important to follow all the protective measures carefully, as you may be more susceptible to viruses, such as coronavirus.

Vaccinations if you are severely immunosuppressed

If you were severely immunosuppressed when you had your first or second vaccine dose and you have not had your third dose yet, please contact your health board. The details can be found here gov.wales/get-your-covid-19-vaccination.

Some immunosuppressive treatments may affect when you get your third vaccine dose. Your GP or clinician can give you advice about this and when to book your appointment.

The third primary dose of the Covid-19 vaccine is an extra “top-up” dose to help increase the level of protection for people who may not have generated a full immune response to the first two doses. This is different to a booster dose. A booster dose is an extra dose, which extends the vaccines’ protection.

If you are severely immunosuppressed and have already had your three primary doses of the vaccine, you will now be offered a booster. There will be a gap of three months (12 weeks) between the third dose and booster dose.

Booster vaccinations

If you are NOT severely immunosuppressed, you will be eligible for a booster three months (12 weeks) after your second dose.

You will be invited to come for an appointment by letter, text or phone call.

The vaccine is the best way to prevent serious illness and the spread of Covid-19.

I strongly urge you to say yes to all vaccination offers. Please prioritise this booster appointment when it comes.

The vaccine programme is open and available to all eligible adults. It is never too late to arrange an appointment. You can find out who to contact at: gov.wales/get-your-covid-19-vaccination

Easier lateral flow tests now available

New lateral flow tests, which only need a nose swab are now available. These tests are free and much easier to use. They can detect the new omicron variant.

You can order them from www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests or collect them from a local pharmacy.

We are working with local councils to make free lateral flow tests more widely available from community centres, local council offices and libraries.

You might work somewhere which offers regular testing. If you do, please carry on with your workplace regular testing.

It is important you report all your lateral flow test results – positive, negative or void.

We are asking everyone to “flow before you go”. This means doing a lateral flow test before going out, travelling or visiting friends or family. I would encourage you to ask any visitors to your home or people you are meeting to also take a test to help protect you. This could include friends, family who do not live with you, carers, and tradespeople coming into your home.

We are also asking health and social care staff to take lateral flow tests every day before they start work. More people testing will help us control the spread of the virus, protecting us and helping reduce the pressure on the NHS.

If you develop symptoms of coronavirus

You will need to self-isolate if you develop:

- A new continuous cough
- A high temperature
- A loss of or change to your sense of smell or taste

You should also apply for a PCR test if you develop one of these symptoms.

This can be done on the NHS website at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-a-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>. Please do not visit your GP surgery or hospital to request a test, as you may infect others.

Covid-19 treatments

The NHS has started to use new treatments for Covid-19. You might be suitable for these, depending on your medical history, if you test positive for Covid-19 with a PCR test.

These treatments need to be given within five days of symptoms and can help you manage your Covid-19 symptoms and reduce the risk of you becoming seriously unwell.

If you are eligible for treatment, in most cases your health board will telephone you after you have a PCR test which shows you have Covid-19. They will arrange an appointment with a healthcare professional who will decide whether the treatment is suitable for you.

You can visit <https://gov.wales/covid-19-treatments> for more information about who is eligible for treatment.

Choices you can make and action to take, to help reduce your risk

Sticking to the basic measures will help you protect yourself this winter:

- Keep contacts to a minimum
- Meet other people outside where possible
- Take a lateral flow test before meeting other people and ask those you are meeting to do the same.
- Keep indoor areas well ventilated.
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are not available
- Stay two metres – or three steps away – from people you do not live with.
- Avoid touching your face and wear a face covering where required.
- Clean surfaces regularly and avoid touching surfaces others have touched

How we will support you

We will continue to keep a record of the people who are on the Shielding Patient List, so we can contact you and update you if we need to.

Priority slots for supermarket deliveries continue to be available in Wales. The major food retailers now have much more capacity for deliveries so there is less need to have separate arrangements. These arrangements have already ended in some other areas of the UK and will end for Wales in February 2022.

If you need support and you do not have anyone to help you, you can speak with your local council – details are here: <https://gov.wales/find-your-local-authority>. If you need help with collecting medicines and have no one to help you, please contact your pharmacy directly.

If advice changes for your area, announcements will be made on local radio and television. I will write to you if I am going to advise you to follow shielding measures again.

Receiving a letter like this for the first time

If you are receiving a letter like this for the first time, it is because your health records show you have a serious health condition, which may put you at risk of severe illness if you catch coronavirus. You have been added to the Shielding Patient List.

If you have not been advised of this before, you may want to talk with your GP or hospital doctor. You should follow the guidance set out in this letter. You can find further advice on shielding at gov.wales/shielding.

Ongoing review

I will continue to keep the Shielding Patient List under review. If your inclusion on the list changes as part of this ongoing review, I will write to you.

You can get up to date information about coronavirus in **Easy Read** and **BSL** here:

Welsh Government:



www.gov.wales/coronavirus

www.gov.wales/find-support-affected-coronavirus

Public Health Wales:

www.phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/



If you have a learning disability, and you need support to understand this letter please contact the **Wales Learning Disability Helpline**:



By e-mail: helpline.wales@mencap.org.uk

Or by phone: 0808 8000 300



The Wales Learning Disability Helpline is open Monday to Friday and Bank Holidays between 9am and 5pm.

Work and education

If you have concerns about your health and safety at work, the first conversation you should have is with your employer. You can raise any issues with a union safety representative or with the Health and Safety Executive at www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm, or your local council.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly by your employer, or somebody who gives you a service, then the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) offers free advice on 0808 800 0082 or textphone on 0808 800 0084 or you can visit the website:

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

If you attend an educational setting, please discuss any concerns you have about your health and safety directly with the setting.

Looking after your wellbeing

Information about staying well is available at the Public Health Wales website:

www.phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/how-are-you-doing/

ACTivate Your Life is a four-session course which teaches people about stress and suffering caused by emotional issues, like worry or chronic pain. To start the course, go to phw.nhs.wales/activateyourlife.

SilverCloud is an online course which offers support for anxiety, depression, and much more, and is based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). You can sign up at nhs.wales.silvercloudhealth.com/signup/.

CALL Mental Health Listening Line provides a confidential mental health listening and emotional support line which is open 24/7. CALL can also signpost to support in local communities and a range of online information. Call 0800132737, text "help" to 81066 or visit callhelpline.org.uk/.

Mind Active Monitoring provides six weeks of guided self-help for anxiety, depression, self-esteem and more. To get started, talk to your GP, any other health professional, or sign up directly at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/get-involved/active-monitoring-sign-up/active-monitoring-form/>.

The Young Person's Mental Health Toolkit links young people, aged 11 to 25, to websites, apps, helplines, and more to build resilience. You can access the toolkit at bit.ly/ypmhten.

Older people, their family, friends, carers, or professionals can contact Age Cymru's Advice Line on 08000 223 444.

You can contact your local council to discuss what other help is available in your area from voluntary and community organisations. Please also discuss any concerns with your GP.

If you do not have enough money to pay your bills, it is important to seek help as early as possible. Call Citizen's Advice free on 03444 77 20 20 or visit the Citizens Advice website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Use of data

Electronic patient data held by GPs and hospitals was used to identify people most at risk of serious illness caused by Covid-19. We used this data to write to you to provide you with advice and guidance on how to protect yourself. Information about you, which did not include medical information, was shared with Welsh Government so that it could ensure essential support was put in place.

Welsh Government shared that data with local authorities, water companies, community pharmacies and supermarkets so that they could provide essential support, including prioritised access to food and medication deliveries where needed.

During the outbreak we will keep your contact details in case we need to contact you again. We are continually reviewing whether our partners need the data that has been provided and will ensure that it is returned to us or securely destroyed when we have determined it is no longer needed. You can find a copy of our Covid-19 Privacy Statement on this link: www.gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-supporting-vulnerable-people-privacy-statement.html

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