**Dear Patient**

**This letter is about advice on returning to work**

As COVID-19 rates are now substantially lower than at the peak of the outbreak, the government has decided to pause shielding from 1st August (insert date as to region). This letter is to provide you with advice that allows you to make decisions about how you wish to approach the next few months, including when and how to return to work. It covers the risk to your health from COVID-19 after the end of the shielding period.

**Key advice includes:**

|  |
| --- |
| * You should still try to work from home if possible * If not possible, you should have a risk assessment **BEFORE** you return to your usual place of work * Everyone has a different risk of significant harm from COVID-19 – your health care team will explain your risk * You can get further information and support from our charity partners at   <https://www.kidneycareuk.org/news-and-campaigns/coronavirus-advice/>  <https://www.kidney.org.uk/> |

**Why may I need to return to work (away from home)?**

Many kidney patients have been affected by COVID-19 since March 2020. Some patients in certain groups, for instance older transplant and dialysis patients, have had very severe disease and sadly some of these have died. Many of you have shielded and we would like to thank you for the efforts that you have made to protect your own health and that of others. We know that many of you have found the restrictions of shielding extremely difficult but that this may also have protected you when COVID-19 rates were high.

It is therefore good news that we have seen a recent significant fall in the numbers of COVID-19 cases, though we recognise that there have been some local peaks. With the pausing of shielding, many patients are very anxious about starting to return to a degree of normality and some of you have asked for advice about returning to your places of work.

We would therefore like to help you understand who is most vulnerable to help you stay protected. We would also like to help identify those who are less likely to be severely affected by COVID-19 so that you can regain some of the freedom you have sacrificed over the last few months. It is then for you to work with your employer to decide if and how you return to work.

**What do I need to do?**

Employers have a duty to assess your work environment in accordance with **Health and Safety Executive guidance** (see links at bottom). You are entitled to an individual risk assessment with your employer and to understand the modifications that have been made in your work environment BEFORE you return to any work outside your home. You may also wish to discuss modifications to your journey to work with your employer, for instance by travelling at off peak times, or travelling in your own vehicle. In discussion with your employer, you may be able to agree that where it is possible for you to do so, you should work from home. If this is possible it is the preferred option for all patients previously shielded.

All advice is dependent on current rates of COVID-19 infection. If there are local spikes or a second wave, those patients who remain clinically extremely vulnerable, will be advised to re-shield as needed.

We understand that these are challenging times - our risk assessment is a guide not an absolute. Regardless of risk please remember that the most effective way to preventing catching and spreading of COVID-19 is to wash your hand regularly, wear a mask in any crowded space, and on public transport and in shops and maintain social distancing when out and about.

**What is my risk of serious harm from getting COVID-19?**

Your health care team has assessed your risk of a serious outcome were you to develop COVID-19. We have divided patients into 4 levels of risk based on best available data and expert opinion. Level 1 is the highest level of risk and level 4 is the lowest.

No patient is prevented from returning to work as a result of their medical condition, but some patients may feel their risk is too great to do so. Our understanding at the time of writing this letter is that any temporary financial support provided by the Government during the shielding period will not continue beyond 31 July unless there is a local lockdown. If you were previously entitled to support within the furlough scheme, you may continue to receive this support until the scheme finishes at the end of October. This guidance is for employers to use with you, and should be used in conjunction with that from the government. It is subject to change as the COVID- 19 situation changes.

**What makes my risk higher or lower?**

Your health care team have assessed your risk of a serious outcome from COVID- 19 taking into account your age, your stage of kidney disease and its treatment and other additional medical problems that you have. Some of you will be thought of as high risk because you have a one or two important risk factors, for instance you are older than 70 years and have severe kidney impairment. For others, the high risk category will be the result of you having several moderate risk factors all together. All the risk factors are based on the best data available about the general population combined with our best data from the kidney community. Based on your health, your clinical team feel you are in:

**Insert characteristics in to letter – e.g.:**

*[Level 1 – the highest risk group of patients*

*This is because you*

*Example 1*

*Are over 70*

*And are on dialysis*

*Or, example 2*

*Are over 60*

*And have kidney function of less than 15% of normal (stage 5 kidney disease)*

*And have diabetes and hypertension]*

We therefore recommend that you:

**Insert advice – e.g.:**

*[Level 1 (highest risk)*

*Ideally work from home*

*If attending work, you should work with your employer to ensure that risk is not significantly greater than the risk within your own home.*

*You should ensure there is a low likelihood of anyone not following social distancing and ensure that you are able to maintain good hygiene with a lowest level of risk of contacting contaminated objects and surfaces.*

*You should ensure that your work environment is COVID secure: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19]*

**Where can I get further support?**

*[Add in any optional services locally available for additional advice]*

We recognise that thinking about risk due to COVID 19 can cause anxiety - if you would like further support you may find it helpful to contact your local renal unit counselling service at [……] or to access our kidney charity websites.

<https://www.kidneycareuk.org/news-and-campaigns/coronavirus-advice/>

<https://www.kidney.org.uk/>

Yours Sincerely

XXX Renal Unit

**Other useful links**

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm>

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19