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Covid-19: Children with conditions managed in primary care may not need to shield

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Most children who are managed in a primary care setting for conditions such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, and kidney disease may not need to continue to shield and could return to school once they reopen, says new guidance from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.¹

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The guidelines set out two groups of shielding patients, with group A being told to continue to shield and group B advised to review whether they need to shield after a conversation between the child, family, and clinician. This update after a review by the college concluded that “not all those children and young people who are currently advised to shield need to continue to do so.”

These include many children with conditions such as cerebral palsy and scoliosis for whom the benefits of school, in terms of access to therapies and developmental support, far outweigh the risk of covid-19 infection, the guidance states.

Group A includes children and teenagers who are clinically extremely vulnerable, such as those at risk of severe infection because of immunodeficiency or with very specific immunosuppression as part of cancer therapy and those with significantly impaired ability to cough and to clear airway secretions. All children in this group should continue to shield.

Group B includes children who were born prematurely and who have oxygen or intermittent non-invasive ventilation requirements and patients with symptomatic heart failure, particularly those on heart failure therapy.

The document said, “A decision to shield will depend on the severity of the condition and knowledge that the secondary and tertiary care clinical teams have of the particular circumstances of the child. If, following a discussion, a child is advised not to shield, they should maintain stringent social distancing.”

Liz Whittaker, a specialist in paediatric infectious diseases and immunology and coauthor of the college’s guidance, said, “We need to get the balance right between clinical risks and the social impact of shielding. We know this has been a tough period for lots of children, young people, and their loved ones. This guidance is to help doctors have evidence based discussions with parents and carers.”

1 Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. Covid-19: “shielding” guidance for children and young people. 2020. <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-shielding-guidance-children-young-people#children-who-should-be-advised-to-shield>.

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