

Checklist for employers of people diagnosed with leukaemia

Leukaemia Care has launched the #LifeVsLivelihood campaign to highlight the concerns leukaemia patients have returning to work as lockdown restrictions ease across the country. Many leukaemia patients remain vulnerable to COVID-19, as it is not yet clear whether they are fully protected by the vaccine. Some leukaemia patients are known to respond poorly to other vaccines, such as the annual flu vaccine. One recent study on COVID-19 vaccine efficacy found that 75% of chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) patients have an antibody response after both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine compared with 100% of healthy age matched people. Furthermore, even when antibody responses were positive these patients produced 100 times lower amounts of antibodies than those without leukaemia. We have also seen evidence that the vaccine may work less well for some patients with myeloproliferative neoplasms or MDS, so more work is needed to understand this issue in all leukaemia types. In addition, many leukaemia patients are at a higher risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19 infection than people with other cancers.

Many patients therefore feel they have no choice but to continue to shield, yet many are already being asked to return to their normal workplace or anticipate they will be asked to do so soon. We must continue to protect this population until we know more about the vaccine efficacy. That is why we have created a simple checklist for employers to help you discuss the return to work with any affected employees you may have.

- Discuss the challenges of the employee's diagnosis with the employee, including both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 challenges.
 - Take the time to understand their specific leukaemia type and their personal concerns
- Conduct an individual risk assessment based on the employee's needs. Full details on doing this can be found using these links:
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/disabilities.htm>
<https://www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home/health-safety-and-wellbeing>
- Share both the individual risk assessment and the whole company risk assessment with the employee, so they can provide feedback.
- Ask the employee to suggest reasonable adjustments, based on the risk assessment.
 - If they had existing adjustments in place, do not assume these are adequate
 - Discuss any further changes specific to the pandemic
- Consider the employee's suggested reasonable adjustments.
 - Respond in writing
 - Do not reject anything due to cost before exploring the Access to Work scheme.
<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work>
 - Consider short term changes until the pandemic subsides

If you are able to reach an agreement with the employee:

- Record the adjustments and the timeframe in writing
- Periodically review the changes to ensure they continue to meet the employees needs

If you are unable to agree changes with the employee:

- Consider the furlough scheme
 - This remains open until September and the clinically extremely vulnerable remain eligible, even if no one else in the company is furloughed at present: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>
- If redundancies are considered, ensure leukaemia patients are not directly or indirectly discriminated against, as a result of their concerns about returning to work or for any other reason related to their diagnosis.

You can also take advice from ACAS: <https://www.acas.org.uk/advice> or Macmillan: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/get-help/help-with-work/employers> if you are unsure about any steps in this guide.