

Dear Employer,

Thank you for all your hard work in supporting your employees throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The work from home guidance introduced in winter was designed to limit the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant. Now that this guidance has come to an end, The Rare Autoimmune Rheumatic Disease Alliance (RAIRDA) would like to bring to your attention the continued risk to people like your employee who has lupus which impacts their immune system.

The Government has advised people who are immunosuppressed, and/or entitled to a third primary dose of COVID-19 vaccine to **work from home**. The [guidance](#) reads as follows:

“Work from home if this feels right for you - If you cannot work from home, speak to your employer about what arrangements they can make to reduce your risk.”

RAIRDA would like to ensure that all employers are aware of this, and have put in place necessary accommodations to make things as safe as possible for their employees. Further advice can be found in the Government’s [Working Safely During COVID-19 guidance](#).

Who is RAIRDA?

The Rare Autoimmune Rheumatic Disease Alliance (RAIRDA) brings together patient organisations (Scleroderma and Raynaud's UK, Vasculitis UK, British Sjögren’s Syndrome Association and LUPUS UK) and clinicians working in the field as a strong voice to campaign for improved care for people living with rare autoimmune rheumatic diseases (RAIRDs). These diseases are characterised by the body’s own immune system becoming overactive and attacking healthy tissues, often in multiple organs throughout the body simultaneously, leading to tissue or organ damage which can be fatal. To learn more about RAIRDs or the work we do, please direct yourself to the [RAIRDA](#) website.

Rheumatic diseases have a significant impact on an individual’s health and immunity, which resulted in many adults in England with these conditions being told to shield at the start of the COVID pandemic. The reality is many of these people have never stopped shielding. This is because research has shown the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccinations in immunosuppressed individuals has been shown to be reduced in comparison to the rest of the UK population. Research from the RECORDER project in March-July 2020 showed that people with RAIRDs had a 54% increased risk of COVID-19 infection and more than twice the risk of COVID-19-related death compared to the general population.¹ Not only does this mean they are at greater risk of catching COVID-19, they are also more vulnerable to the severe effects of the virus should they catch it.

Given the very high transmissibility rates of the Omicron variant, and continued high numbers of cases, RAIRDA is advising immunosuppressed people to exercise caution where possible, which includes taking measures such as continuing to work from home, if able.

Kind regards,

The Rare Autoimmune Rheumatic Disease Alliance

RAIRDA

¹ Megan Rutter, Peter C Lanyon, Matthew J Grainge, Richard Hubbard, Emily Peach, Mary Bythell, Peter Stilwell, Jeanette Aston, Sarah Stevens, Fiona A Pearce, COVID-19 infection, admission and death among people with rare autoimmune rheumatic disease in England: results from the RECORDER project, [Rheumatology, 2021](#)