

NHS Scotland Communication with the ‘extremely vulnerable’

Background:

On 17 March 2020, as part of a wider action plan to respond to the Covid-19 challenge, the First Minister announced: *“The third and final step is to shield the most vulnerable – by which I mean specifically people with compromised immune systems. GPs and other healthcare workers will be contacting these patients to ensure they are fully supported.”*

The highest risk vulnerable group consists of approximately 200,000 individuals who need to be the highest priority in being shielded from Covid-19 through a range of local support.

Definition of ‘extremely vulnerable’

The four UK nations’ Chief Medical Officers have identified six categories of people at highest risk of severe illness from Covid-19:

- Solid organ transplant recipients
- People with specific cancers
 - People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
 - People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
 - People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
 - People having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.
 - People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.
- People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD
- People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection
- People who are pregnant with significant congenital heart disease

Approach for Contact

The UK Government announced on Sunday 22 March, that they would be writing to those affected in England to provide specific advice.

Communication started in England on Monday 23 March.

The Scottish Government has committed to write to individuals in Scotland and we are hopeful that will start Tuesday 24 March.

Detail of Contact in Scotland

Mirroring the approach by UK Gov, we will be writing to:

- **GPs and Boards** – outlining what the approach is and what help they need to offer. This will include details of the conditions and what they should be doing
- **Letter to patients** with detail about *how* to shield, what they need to do and that there will be support made available for them. We will draw them to various sources of support; and this will be followed up by resilience partners.
- **Shielding guidance**: this will be the same as issued by the UK Government; we will seek to publish this and put it on NHS inform

Individuals will either receive a letter sent centrally (where we can identify them from central purposes) or through their GP / Clinician.

Organ transplants: We can write centrally to this group as they are easily identifiable.

People with specific Cancers: there are various sub-groups to this group; most likely we will go through specialist clinicians; therefore the communication will go through Boards and clinicians to get to the individuals. This will take a bit longer, again this mirrors the UK approach. We also anticipate some individuals in this group may receive communication twice due to the approach we're taking, but given time we'd prefer that than the risk of missing any individuals out. Again, the UK DCMO explained this during the UK press conference today.

Severe Respiratory illnesses: we are using the prescribing database here, so we will need to go through GPs

Rare diseases: This group is easier to define and we can send centrally

Immunosuppression therapies: we are using a two pronged approach to ensure we identify all individuals: through using drugs list and databases and also using the Royal College of Physicians, which was the approach the UK used. We have better data in Scotland than at UK for this group, however, it is very complicated and we will be identifying through drug use – therefore this again will take some time.

Pregnant with significant congenital heart disease: this a very small and easily identifiable group and will be contacted centrally.

Links to Resilience

Details will be shared with Resilience partners to ensure that those identified are offered the support they may require to self isolate.

Shielding Guidance

Coronavirus (Covid-19) Do's and Don'ts

You may wish to keep this sheet handy so you can refer to it when needed.

As always – if you have a critical medical emergency, whether related to the coronavirus or not, phone 999.

If, at any point, you think you have developed symptoms of coronavirus, such as a new, continuous cough and/or a high temperature (above 37.8 °C), seek clinical advice by phoning NHS 111 . **Do this as soon as you get these symptoms**

- **STRICTLY AVOID** contact with anyone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature (above 37.8 °C) and/or a new and continuous cough. You might want to have a thermometer at home to check your temperature if you are worried that you may have a fever.
- **DON'T** leave your home.
- **DON'T** attend any gatherings. This includes gatherings of friends and families in private spaces e.g. family homes, weddings and religious services.
- **DON'T** go out for shopping, leisure or travel. When arranging food or medication deliveries, these should be left at the door to minimise contact.
- **DO** keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.
- **DO** use telephone or online services to contact your GP (for non-coronavirus related matters) or other essential services.
- **DO** regularly wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. Ask carers or support workers who visit your home to do the same.
- **DO** minimise the time you spend with others in shared spaces (kitchen, bathroom and sitting areas) and keep any shared spaces well ventilated.
- **DO** aim to keep 6 feet (3 steps) away from others and encourage them to sleep in a different bed where possible.
- **DO** use separate towels and, if possible, use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household, or clean the bathroom with cleaning products after every use.
- **DO** avoid using the kitchen when others are present, take your meals back to your room to eat where possible, and ensure all kitchenware is cleaned thoroughly, using a dishwasher at the 60 degrees setting if possible, otherwise in very warm soapy water.