



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

From:

Health and Social Services Group

Name Redacted

Irrelevant & Sensitive

Cleared by:

Dr Frank Atherton

Date:

02 July 2020

MINISTERIAL ADVICE

For decision by: Minister for Health and Social Services

Copied to: First Minister

Subject	COVID 19 – Next steps for Shielding in Wales
100 word summary	Those who are shielding are currently advised to remain doing so until 16 th August 2020. In line with a commitment to review shielding on the same timeframe to the three week review of lockdown regulations, Ministers are asked to consider whether any change to shielding advice may be appropriate for the review announced on 10 th July
Timing	A decision is requested by Friday 3 rd July
Recommendation	The Minister is asked to agree: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Option 2 – Pause shielding from 31st July is the preferred option 2) Medicines delivery support moves into a two month transition phase from the date that shielding is paused; 3) As a result of this option the CMO will write to all those on the Shielding patients list; 4) The announcement that shielding will pause is linked to the three week review on 10th July.
Decision report	This decision does require a Decision Report, which may be published after 10 th July.

ADVICE

Background

1. To date approximately 130,000 people in Wales have received a letter advising them to shield from COVID-19 and signposting them to further support. Most recently, the Chief Medical Officer for Wales wrote to those who are shielding asking them to continue to do so until 16th August and indicated that going forward shielding would be reviewed on a three weekly basis, alongside Coronavirus regulations. The next review is due to be undertaken on 9th July with the outcomes announced publically on 10th July.
2. Shielding was put in place to protect those who were most clinically vulnerable from the effects of the coronavirus at a time when the virus prevalence was high in our communities. As we have passed the peak and prevalence is reducing it is necessary to look again at shielding and consider how best to relax the restrictions that have been protecting these individuals.
3. Chief Medical Officers across the four nations have expressed a desire to remain closely aligned on shielding and all of the UK nations have been taking similar, cautious steps to relax some of the restrictions for those who are shielding as prevalence has reduced. Most recently in Wales the announcement on 29th June gave those who are shielding additional relaxations to allow them to form part of an extended household from 6th July. Recently both England and Northern Ireland have indicated that they intend to pause the advice for those who are shielding from 31st July. It is also expected that Scotland will make an announcement on the relaxation of advice from 31st July at their lockdown review on 9th July.
4. Ministers have previously been made aware that a risk analysis tool is in development that should allow clinicians to make a fuller assessment of risk as we move toward the Autumn and Winter, when prevalence of the disease may increase. It is likely that as this tool becomes available, it will be possible for a more targeted group of individuals to be recommended for shielding as necessary.
5. There are allied considerations to any changes to the arrangements for shielding people. This includes employment-related matters as the Chief Medical Officer letter can be utilised where required as proof of entitlement to statutory sick pay. Related considerations also include the provision of food boxes for those who are unable to access support from families, friends and community to deliver food. This sits alongside the very significant support provided by Local Authorities to this group and also the provision of access to priority supermarket delivery slots offered by the 8 major supermarkets in Wales. In addition, support for the delivery of prescriptions and medicines for those without existing social networks has been facilitated through a Welsh Government funded scheme.

Advice

6. The Chief Medical Officer for Wales has presented a number of different options on the way forward as detailed below. These can be discussed with you in relation to current prevalence rates in Wales and the overall advice in relation to the easing of lockdown if you would prefer.

7. **Option 1** – Pause shielding from 16th August and allow existing CMO notification to run its course. Advantages of this option include the clarity provided by the previous notification of the review date and an expectation that people will need to shield until this date. Aligns to public messaging from Welsh Government that shielding is in place until 16th August. Allows those who are shielding to take advantage of some of the summer weather and the lower prevalence to return to work and shopping.
8. Disadvantages include the divergence from all other UK nations on the date shielding is to be paused, and potentially asking those who are shielding to do so for two additional weeks when the prevalence levels are so low there is no clinical need to do so.
9. **Option 2** – Pause shielding from 31st July. Advantages include and alignment with the advice from the other 4 nations, an ability for those who are shielding to maximise the opportunity to return to normal life including work and leisure activities. Allow for the maximum period of time without restriction across the summer months.
10. Disadvantages include the need to issue another communication from the Chief Medical Officer relatively soon after the previous letter. There may be some confusion around having a letter which says to shield until 16th August and then another which advises that shielding is paused from an earlier date. However there were references in the last letter that the advice could change if prevalence reduced (see details below). There may also be some uncertainty for those who rely on the support provisions or utilise the letter as evidence for their employer that they are unable to attend work/claim SSP.
11. **Option 3** – Further relaxations as they are introduced for the population more broadly and no position on shielding post 16th August. This option has the advantage of providing small clearly defined steps out of lockdown and allows shielding people to feel more confident in being outside gradually. Whilst limited, it starts to help with concerns around isolation and lack of social interaction and also encourages physical activity.
12. Disadvantages include the ongoing support required for this group, who continue to live a more restricted life than others in society. It is out of step with other UK nations, and existing advice on the balance of risk, due to lower prevalence and the inherent harms shielding causes. There is also a need for the CMO to continue regular communications with the shielding group and uncertainty on the future of shielding for those who have school, work commitments or employ people who are shielding etc. Given that those who are shielding have already been advised that they can join extended households from 6th July there are limited further relaxations that can be made without affecting SSP entitlement.
13. **Option 4** – No change. No additional relaxations nor a position given on shielding after 16th August at the lockdown review on 10th July. Next advice to be given linked to 31st July review. Advantages include the certainty this provides for the shielding cohort that the advice remains in place for now. Allows additional time

for engagement with the cohort and third sector representatives on future of shielding.

14. Disadvantages include the potential for an immediate release from lockdown given potential for prevalence levels to fall and thus no time to plan, limited time between 31st July and end of lockdown advice on 16th August. May signal an intention to extend shielding beyond 16th August. Also makes future planning for support mechanisms including food boxes and pharmacy support difficult to plan and contract for.
15. Considering the advice of the CMO, **the recommended option for Ministers is Option 2**. This option would include a letter being issued to those in the shielded cohort advising them that shielding advice will be paused from 31st July.
16. The previous advice sent to those who are shielding supports further communication in advance of 16th August. The letter stated:
You should follow the advice in this letter until 16 August 2020. If the advice changes, I will write to you again.

I am carefully monitoring the spread of coronavirus. If it falls, I will be able to advise you to do more. If it gets higher, I may need to ask you to stop going outside and to stay at home again.
I will write to you again before 16 August 2020 but please regularly check the Welsh Government website for the latest information....
17. We are mindful that the situation may arise where local lockdowns are required in Wales and there may need to be specific advice for those who are shielding. In drafting the patient letter officials will consider how appropriate messages could be included.

Further support

18. Given the recommendation that shielding advice is paused allows those who are shielding to return to work and access shops, it is expected that access to food boxes will be discontinued on the date advice is paused. This is in line with schemes across the other UK nations. Priority access to supermarket slots will remain in place for the time being, subject to ongoing data sharing arrangements being agreed, to offer a safety net to those who have been shielding.
19. In relation to the delivery of medicines; the National Volunteer Prescription Delivery Scheme is utilising a Welsh developed online system, Pro Delivery Manager, and is currently supported by volunteers from various third sector organisations, specifically British Red Cross and St John Ambulance Cymru. The Welsh Government has contracts in place with Pro Delivery Manager and British Red Cross until 30 September 2020 and 31 July 2020 respectively (MA/VG/1168/20). In addition you will be aware that a contract is also in place with Royal mail to deliver prescriptions until 30 September 2020 (MA/VG/1392/20).
20. Concerns have been raised from community pharmacy contractors that the schemes put in place to support medicines delivery to shielding and self-isolated

people has created a dependency and expectation of delivery which needs to be addressed; managing this expectation will require robust communication and media handling for both members of the public and pharmacies.

21. Officials intend to utilise the risk analysis tool, when developed, to support pharmacies with the reprioritisation of medicine delivery slots and how best to advise people regarding the end of the support being offered for medicines delivery. There is currently no clear date when this personalised risk analysis tool will be available in Wales and may impact the speed at which medicines delivery support can be practically stepped down. Advice is still in place to minimise general footfall through pharmacies and is something that officials would like to maintain; in particular a focus on keeping those who are most clinically vulnerable and susceptible to illness away from environments where social distancing is difficult and could place those who were previously shielding at an increased risk of becoming unwell.
22. It is therefore advised that if the recommended option of 31 July is agreed, medicines delivery support moves into a two month transition phase from the date that shielding is paused to allow these concerns to be suitably addressed and review contracts of Pro Delivery Manager, third sector organisation and Royal Mail accordingly. Further advice will be shared with you on how that step down will be achieved if you are content to support this approach.

Financial Implications

23. The financial implication of one mailing to the cohort of 130,000 individuals is c. £0.085m, which is based on the actual expenditure incurred from the first round of mailings as approved within MA/VG/1763/20.
24. To ensure letters and guidance are available in an accessible format there is also an associated cost of £0.005m per guidance change/letter issue. This will result in a total cost of c.£0.090m for one round of mailing which will be met within the HSS MEG Covid19 budget (X.HSS.Covid19).

Legal Implications

25. Section 1 of the NHS (Wales) Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act') places a general duty on the Welsh Ministers to provide or secure the provision of services for the purpose of the promotion in Wales of a comprehensive health service. Additionally, the Welsh Ministers may, under section 2 of the Act, do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of such a duty. The Welsh Ministers also have general powers under section 60 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 (GOWA) to do anything which they consider appropriate to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of Wales. This power may be exercised in relation to the whole or any part of Wales, or to all or any persons resident or present in Wales. This includes a power to enter into arrangements or agreements with any person, and to facilitate and co-ordinate the activities of any person.
26. Currently people who are unable to work due to the fact that they are shielding are eligible to claim Statutory Sick Pay by virtue of provisions in the Statutory Sick Pay (General) Regulations 1982 ("the Regulations"). Pausing shielding will mean that

persons are no longer eligible to claim SSP. However the Regulations enable eligible persons to claim SSP again if the decision is made to require persons to shield in the future.

Communication or media handling

27. Each communication with the Shielding cohort has resulted in increased media and political scrutiny and a significant volume of enquiries from stakeholders and the public. Officials are already engaged with communications colleagues and a detailed handling plan is being prepared.
28. Advice on ending further support, specifically provision of food boxes and medicine delivery, will be included in the next shielding letter from the CMO to help manage public expectation.

Annex 1: ASSURANCE AND COPY RECIPIENTS**CLEARANCE TRACKING**

Aspect	Tracking	Yes	No	N/A	Clearance no.
Finance	Financial implications over £50,000?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Cleared by Group Finance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	NJ7591/20
	Cleared by Strategic Budgeting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
	Cleared by Local Government Finance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Legal	Legal issues?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Cleared by relevant lawyers?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Governance	Novel and contentious issues?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Cleared by Corporate Governance Centre of Excellence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

DEPUTY DIRECTOR, STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

In clearing this MA, I confirm that I, Dr Frank Atherton have quality assured this advice, ensuring it is provided on the basis of evidence, accurately presents the options and facts and I am accountable for the recommendations made

I am satisfied that the recommended decision or action, if agreed, would be lawful, affordable and comply with all relevant statutory obligations. Welsh Government policy priorities and cross portfolio implications have been fully considered in line with delivery of the government objectives.

I have fully considered the statement of assurance contained in the MA guidance to ensure all relevant considerations have been taken into account and that the actions and decisions take account of regularity, propriety and value for money.

COPY LIST

All mandatory copy recipients (as indicated in the guidance). Additional copy recipients specifically interested in this advice:

- First Minister
- Minister for Housing and Local Government,
- Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs
- Counsel General and Minister for European Transition,
- Minister for Finance and Trefnydd
- Madeleine Brindley,
- Kate Edmunds,
- Clare Jenkins,

- Andrew Goodall
- Chief Medical Officer,
- Mark Walker,
- Tim Render,
- Chris Jones,
- Helen Arthur
- Chrishan Kamalan,

Name Redacted

Name Redacted

Name Redacted

Name Redacted

- HSS Press team

Name Redacted

- HSS-Finance

Name Redacted

- Sarah Wakeling

Name Redacted

- Alex Slade

Name Redacted