

Wednesday, 15 April 2020

## Patients at Highest Risk of Coronavirus complications – information for patients

Dear Patient

The government has been identifying individuals at the **highest** clinical risk from coronavirus (COVID-19). These are people, including children, who are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus because of an underlying health condition.

In late March the government wrote to most of these patients to inform them that they should stay at home at all times and avoid all face-to-face contact for a period of at least 12 weeks. This is known as 'shielding'.

Shielding is a measure to protect people who are clinically extremely vulnerable by minimising all interaction between those who are extremely vulnerable and others. Those who are shielding **should not leave the house at all** for a period of at least 12 weeks from the date they are advised to shield.

This differs from the advice given to the general population, who should stay at home except when they need:

- To shop for basic necessities or pick up medicine
- To work if they cannot work from home
- To exercise once a day
- To attend a medical appointment, give blood or care for a vulnerable person.

People that are shielding may need extra help to get access to food and medication because they should not leave the house. The government has established a national support offer to make sure these people have access to medicines and basic supplies during this time.

People falling into this **Highest Clinical Risk** group are classified as follows:

1. Solid organ transplant recipients
2. People with specific cancers:
  - people with cancer and are having chemotherapy
  - people with lung cancer and are having radical radiotherapy
  - 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
- 3. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD
- 4. People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- 5. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection
- 6. Women who are pregnant with significant congenital heart disease

### **How and when Highest Risk patients have been identified**

NHS Digital, the national information and technology partner to the NHS have identified individuals with the conditions defined in the list above.

Part 1 was conducted on 20th March on a fast-track basis, using data from Hospital Episode Statistics, Primary Care Prescribed Medicines, the Personal Demographic Service and the Maternity Services Dataset. This identified approximately 900k individuals.

NHS Digital provided our clinical computer system supplier with the list of patients deemed at highest risk of developing complications. A High Risk code was added to these patients' records in our clinical system on 20th and 24th March as a result. These patients were sent a letter by government giving them information about guidance to shield and they were sent a text message if they had a mobile telephone number recorded.

Part 2 analysis was completed on the 6<sup>th</sup> April using data from general practice records at which point the count of individuals identified grew to approximately 1.3m.

On the 9th April the initial list of highest risk patients was updated and the High Risk code was added to these additional GP clinical records and the additional patients were sent a letter and a text message about shielding.

A number of patients have also been able to self-identify as clinically extremely vulnerable via the Cabinet Office [website](#). The names of individuals, who registered on the website prior to 29 March but have not been identified through the central process, will be communicated to GP Practices shortly. We are required to review these people against the criteria, add the clinical coding and send the shielding letter as required.

The process of identifying patients that need to shield has therefore been ongoing for several weeks. Some patients may not have yet been informed that they need to shield as their letters have only just been sent and some patients are still being identified.

If you do not receive a letter within a week of the date on this letter and you feel you are in the Highest Risk group as (as defined in the list above) please contact us. A clinician will review your record and if you meet this criteria we will update your records and send you a shielding letter with all the information you require.

## People at Moderate Risk

It is important to understand that the 'Highest Risk' clinically vulnerable group are not the same people who the government are advising to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures.

Only patients at the highest clinical risk will be added to the shielded patients list and the government support offer for the Highest Risk Patients is only available to the those in this group. This is to ensure these extremely vulnerable patients have access to medicines and basic supplies during this time.

The Chief Medical Officer has defined patients as being at **moderate** risk if they are:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
  - chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
  - chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
  - chronic kidney disease
  - chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
  - chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
  - diabetes
  - problems with the spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if they have had their spleen removed
  - a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
  - being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above)
  - those who are pregnant

These are the people the government are advising to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures.

Many people think that anyone above who is normally offered the NHS flu vaccination should shield and this is incorrect. The above group should follow social distancing rules but do so even more stringently than the general population, for example they may ask relatives to do their shopping and collect their medicines.

The table below explains the different risk groups and the advice to the different groups. Links to further guidance can be found in the table.

If you have any questions about which group you may be in and whether you should be shielding or social distancing you can contact your hospital consultant for further advice or contact us as your GP practice.

**Table 1: Risk Groups**

Category	Patient Groups	Contact	Advice
<p><b>At Highest Risk / Clinically Vulnerable</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Solid organ transplant recipients</li> <li>2. People with specific cancers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people with cancer and are having chemotherapy</li> <li>• people with lung cancer and are having radical radiotherapy</li> <li>• people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment</li> <li>• people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer</li> <li>• people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors</li> <li>• people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD</li> <li>4. People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)</li> <li>5. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection</li> <li>6. Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired</li> </ol>	<p>Central Contact from NHS Business Services and hospital trusts with advice on shielding via letter and text message</p>	<p>Shielding - stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact for at least twelve weeks.</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19</a></p> <p>Visit <a href="https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable">gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable</a> to register for the support that you need. This service is for people with one of the listed medical conditions or if have been told by their GP or hospital clinician that they need to 'shield'.</p>

<p><b>At Moderate Risk</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)</li> <li>2. Aged under 70 with an underlying health condition (i.e. anyone advised to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis</li> <li>• chronic heart disease, such as heart failure</li> <li>• chronic kidney disease</li> <li>• chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis</li> <li>• chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson’s disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy</li> <li>• diabetes</li> <li>• problems with the spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if they have had their spleen removed</li> <li>• a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy</li> <li>• being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above)</li> <li>• those who are pregnant</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>Have already received advice on social distancing measures on the 16th March (UK government announcement).</p>	<p>Stringent Social Distancing</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults</a></p>
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