



**[Patient Name]**

Patient address Line 1  
Patient address Line 2  
Patient address Line 3]

8 June 2020

**IMPORTANT: PERSONAL**

Your Community Health Index (CHI) number: [CHI NUMBER]

**SHIELDING YOURSELF AT HOME TO STAY SAFE FROM CORONAVIRUS**

Dear [Patient],

We sent you a letter earlier this year that advised you to shield at home because you're at high risk of severe illness from coronavirus. We asked you to shield at home until at least 18 June.

We're now advising you to stay at home until at least the end of July.

We know that shielding has been tough and has a clear impact on your quality of life, but scientific evidence means we cannot advise you to stop shielding. At the moment, it's the best way for you to stay safe from coronavirus.

**Changes to our shielding advice**

We're looking at making some changes to our shielding advice. When we first asked you to shield at home, we advised against all outdoor exercise. We're now advising that, from 18 June, you can go outdoors for exercise, as long as:

- you do not live in a residential care or nursing home – if you do, our advice will remain to stay at home and not go outdoors for exercise
- coronavirus (COVID-19) infection rates in Scotland are low enough

We'll announce whether rates are low enough in the Scottish Government's daily coronavirus briefing on 17 June, through our SMS Shielding Service and on Scottish Government websites.

Once confirmed, our advice will be that there is no limit on the amount of times you can go out to exercise, or how long you can stay out for. If you decide to go out for exercise, you:

- should go for a walk, wheel, run or cycle

- can go out on your own or with someone you live with
- should maintain strict physical distancing, also known as social distancing, at all times, even if you live with the person you're out with
- should not meet with anyone you do not live with
- should choose times and areas that are quiet, if you can
- should stay close to home so you do not have to use a toilet that is not your own
- should wash your hands for at least 20 seconds as soon as you get back home

We're looking to change our advice because we now know that the risk of getting infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) outdoors is very low if:

- infection rates in Scotland are low enough
- you stay 2 metres away from other people

Going out for exercise can also have real benefits for your physical and mental health.

### **Other ways shielding might change in the future**

We know that you may have mixed feelings about this advice. That's why we want to tell you as much as we can about how shielding might change in the future. We are learning about the virus all the time, and about what increases or reduces the risk to you and to others. Over the summer, we will:

- give you updated clinical evidence about your conditions and what that means for your risk from coronavirus (COVID-19)
- help you to understand the changing infection rate in your local area
- give you this information in a way that's helpful and that you can access
- give you access to support to help you make informed choices about your life
- support you to put your choices into practice

We will do this because shielding will be having a huge impact on your life and the lives of your loved ones. It's important that you are given the chance to consider and make informed decisions about what matters to you.

### **Support while shielding until the end of July**

If you're getting support while shielding at home, such as free weekly deliveries of grocery packs, or priority access to online supermarket delivery slots, this support will continue until at least the end of July.

### **Keeping up-to-date with changes to shielding and shielding support**

We'll be in contact by letter about any major changes to our shielding advice before the end of July.

You can also keep up-to-date with any changes we make, either to the support you can get or to shielding advice, by checking online. You'll find the latest shielding advice on [mygov.scot/shielding](https://mygov.scot/shielding) and on NHS Inform.

We'll also use our SMS Shielding Service to send you the latest updates direct to your mobile phone.

If you need to ask someone a question about shielding support or anything else, you can call the free national helpline number on 0800 111 4000. The helpline is open Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm, and will put you in touch with someone from your local council.

### **Working while shielding**

If you cannot work from home, our advice is for you to stay at home and not go to work.

This letter is evidence for your employer that shows you cannot work outside the home. You do not need to get a separate fit note from your GP.

If you're worried about money, check [mygov.scot/shielding](https://mygov.scot/shielding) or [gov.scot](https://gov.scot) for details about things like furlough, statutory sick pay and benefits.

### **The SMS Shielding Service**

The SMS Shielding Service has been set up to give you the latest updates about shielding.

If you have not already, you can join the SMS Shielding Service by sending a text from your mobile phone to 0786 006 4525. The text you send should only include your CHI number.

Your CHI number is the ten-digit number shown towards the top of this letter.

Once we've got your CHI number, we'll send you a text to confirm that you've joined the service and give instructions on how to register for support with food access.

### **We'd like to hear from you if you've been shielding**

Public Health Scotland is running an online survey to find out how you feel about shielding in Scotland. The survey takes about 15 minutes to complete and is open until Sunday 14 June 2020.

You can complete the survey at [surveys.publichealthscotland.scot](https://surveys.publichealthscotland.scot).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gregor Smith', written in a cursive style.

**DR GREGOR SMITH**

INTERIM CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

## **Shielding: medical and health advice**

### **How to keep safe by shielding at home**

When shielding, you should:

- stay at home and not go outside, except to exercise
- keep 2 metres away from everyone, even those you live with, avoiding as much face to face contact as you can
- get the latest updates about shielding by joining the SMS Shielding Service

Those you live with do not need to stay at home and shield, they can go out as normal.

### **Access to healthcare**

No matter what the next steps are your care, treatment and needs are a priority for the Scottish Government and the NHS in Scotland.

It is vital that you get the care you need in the safest way possible. This may be routine or urgent GP or hospital care. To ensure we can provide the care you need in a safe and timely manner, your needs will be assessed by a clinician as part of any GP or hospital care. They will do a risk assessment and decide where, when and how you are seen. This risk assessment is part of the care that doctors and other health professionals do every day to meet the needs of their patients.

Following a risk assessment, it may be that your clinician decides it is best to carry out a consultation or appointment over the telephone or via Near Me (a video calling service used by the NHS). Other times, a face to face consultation or appointment may happen at your home, but equally (after assessment of infection risk, clinical need and service capacity) may involve you going to a practice, health centre or hospital to be seen.

### **Why shielding is not the same as advice to other people**

Because you're in a high risk group, our advice is that you should stay at home and avoid as much face to face contact as you can. From 18 June you can go outside for exercise.

We know this advice is hard to follow, and is not the same as advice to people in lower risk groups, but it's advice you need to follow to protect your health and the NHS.

### **Face coverings**

Our advice is to maintain strict physical distancing, also known as social distancing, while exercising outdoors at all times. This is the best way to stay safe. If you do this, you do not need to wear a face covering.

If, for any reason, you think there's a chance you may not be able to maintain physical distancing at all times, you may want to wear a face covering.

By face coverings, we do not mean the wearing of a surgical or other medical grade mask, but a facial covering of your mouth and nose. This can be made of cloth or other textiles, for example a scarf, through which you can breathe.

## **Other people who live with you**

Other people in your household do not have to shield themselves. This means that if they have to leave the house to go to work, such as if they're a key worker, they can carry on doing so. However, to help keep you safe, they must follow guidance on physical distancing and reduce their contact outside the home where they can. In your home, you should:

- minimise the time you spend with others in shared spaces (kitchen, bathroom and sitting areas) and keep any shared spaces well ventilated
- aim to keep 2 metres away from others and encourage them to sleep in a different bed, where possible
- use separate towels and, if possible, use a separate bathroom or, if this is not possible, clean the bathroom with cleaning products after every use
- 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 set to 60 degrees if you can, or in very warm, soapy water

If the rest of your household are able to follow this guidance to help keep you safe, there is no need for them to wear any special medical clothing or equipment.

## **If you have symptoms of coronavirus**

If it's an emergency, whether related to coronavirus or not, phone 999.

If, at any point, you think you have developed symptoms of coronavirus, phone the NHS on 111. Symptoms include a new, continuous cough, a high temperature (above 37.8 °C) and/or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste. Because you're in a high risk group, you should call 111 if you get any symptoms of coronavirus.

## **If you, or the person you care for, have cancer**

If you, or the person you care for, feel unwell and have had chemotherapy or radiotherapy for a cancer (including a blood cancer) within the last 6 weeks, you should phone either the emergency Scottish Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711 or the emergency number given to you by your consultant or specialist nurse. You should call even if you do not think feeling unwell is due to coronavirus.

## **You've been sent this letter because you, or the person you care for, has a disease or condition on this list:**

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, severe COPD, severe bronchiectasis and pulmonary hypertension.

People with rare diseases, including all forms of Interstitial Lung Disease/Sarcoidosis, 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 or who have had their spleens removed.

People who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.

People who are receiving renal dialysis treatment.

You may have received this letter, even if the above conditions are not relevant to you, if your GP or Hospital Specialist thinks that you would benefit from following this advice.

## **Prescriptions**

Your local pharmacy should be sending you any prescription medicines that you need. Your prescriptions should also cover the same length of time as usual. If you do not have your prescription medicines sent to you, or want someone you know to pick them up, you can arrange this by:

- asking someone you know to pick them up and to leave them at your door (this is the best option, if possible)
- contacting your local council's support line - they will be able to arrange for your medicines to be delivered to your home

If you get medicines or equipment from your hospital care team, they will arrange to have these delivered to you.

## **Looking after your mental wellbeing**

We understand this may be a worrying time and that you may find staying at home and having limited contact frustrating. At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour, which can make you feel worse. Simple things you can do to stay mentally and physically active during this time include:

- look for ideas for exercises to do at home on the NHS website
- spend time doing things you enjoy – reading, cooking, jigsaws and other indoor hobbies
- try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise regularly, and try to avoid smoking, alcohol and recreational drugs
- try spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air, arranging space to sit and see a nice view (if possible) and get some natural sunlight. Get out into the garden or sit on your doorstep if you can, keeping a distance of at least 2 metres from others

## **Data Protection Statement**

We would like to reassure you that while you have been identified from either your GP practice, local Health Board or securely stored national data, in order that we could write to you, this information has been shared appropriately within the NHS in Scotland and did not include your medical record. During this outbreak, we will maintain your contact details in case we need to contact you again. We will also notify your GP and your Health Board that you have been contacted in order that they can provide appropriate support. Should we need to, in order to provide some of the additional support noted above, we will share your contact details only with your local authority (your council) in order that they can support you during this difficult time. We would highlight that this action is only being taken due to the current

coronavirus outbreak, and would assure you that your local authority would not receive any details of your medical condition or health record.

### **How long you'll be able to get support from the SMS Shielding Service**

You'll be able to access the SMS Shielding Service for as long as you're advised you need to stay at home. At the moment, this is until at least the end of July 2020.

### **Get help online**

You can find the latest online health advice on NHS Inform. For the latest Scottish Government updates on coronavirus, visit [gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot) or [mygov.scot](https://mygov.scot).