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| Directorate for Chief Medical Officer Dr Gregor Smith Interim Chief Medical Officer |  |

**For immediate cascade to Primary Care and Hospital Clinicians**

18 June 2020

Dear colleagues,

I am writing with updates on shielding in Scotland.

**1. New advice for people who are shielded on the next steps**

Shielding in Scotland has been extended until 31 July 2020 and continues to be reviewed by Scottish Government. The prevalence of COVID-19 in Scotland is decreasing and current modelling estimates that less than 1 in 2,750 people in Scottland are infected. Clinical advisors have agreed that advice for shielding patients can now be changed.

The key changes which will be announced today (Thursday 18 June) which will take effect immediately are:

* People who are shielding are advised that they can go outdoors for exercise and leisure
* People who are shielded are advised not to enter other indoor areas
* Strict physical distancing and hand hygiene is strongly advised

In addition from Friday 19 June people who are shielding can:

* Meet one other household per day outdoors, provided there is no more than 8 people in the group
* Also take part in non-contact outdoor activities such as golf, hiking, canoeing, outdoor swimming, fishing etc.

This advice applies to most people of all ages who are shielding, including children and pregnant women.

It also applies to those shielding because they are waiting on an organ transplant. Those who are shielding **and** awaiting a solid organ transplant are advised to strictly follow this advice and contact their transplant team to discuss whether specific recommendations in addition to this updated advice should be in place for them.

However, this advice does **not** apply to those who live in a residential nursing or care home.

There is no change to the support offered to those who are shielded – this will continue until at least 31 July 2020.

An annex is included in this letter which provides greater detail and Frequently Asked Questions about the changes.

**2. Respiratory Criteria for New Patients with Severe Asthma or Severe COPD**

At the beginning of the shielding process, medication criteria were used to centrally identify patients with severe asthma and severe COPD for shielding; this has been published on the Public Health Scotland website. The Scottish Government subsequently produced updated criteria, approved by the Clinical Cell, for identifying patients with respiratory disease for shielding. This guidance is published at <https://www.sign.ac.uk/assets/sg_shielding_guidance.pdf>

For colleagues who identify newly diagnosed patients with severe asthma or severe COPD in the future, I would be grateful for the more recent Scottish Government guidance (<https://www.sign.ac.uk/assets/sg_shielding_guidance.pdf>) to be used.

Thank you for your continuing commitment and considerable effort to support this vulnerable group of people during this time.

Yours sincerely,

**DR GREGOR SMITH**

INTERIM CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

**ANNEX**

**Overview of new advice for people who have been asked to shield**

**We are still advising people who have been asked to shield to take additional steps to minimise their chance of catching coronavirus until at least 31 July 2020. This is because, although infection rates are much lower than they were at the start of lockdown, we believe that, on balance, the risks support continuing the advice to shield.**

We will continually review this advice and monitor infection levels, and we will continue to balance the advice to shield against the harms caused by shielding. This will allow us to gradually take steps to ease the advice for shielding further. Changes will only happen when clinicians and scientists advise that the evidence supports doing so.

People who have been asked to shield will continue to receive the support they have been getting, whether that be free weekly food boxes, priority access to supermarket delivery slots, prescription medications deliveries or other support through local authorities until at least 31 July.

On 8 June, we wrote to people who have been asked to shield to advise that they could consider taking exercise outdoors from 18 June, if levels of the virus were low enough. This is because the chance of catching the virus outdoors, when keeping two metres away from anyone else is very low. We said that we would confirm this closer to the time to make sure our advice takes the most recent evidence into account.

**We can now confirm that people who have been asked to shield can spend time outdoors from Thursday 18 June.**

As promised when we made that announcement, we have continued to keep the guidance for shielding under review. Our clinical advisors now recommend that the chance of catching the virus is low enough for people who have been asked to shield to meet in groups of up to 8 people outdoors (no more than one other household per day). This is because we now know that only about 1 in 2,750 people in Scotland currently have the virus that causes COVID-19. Those shielding should still only work from home and avoid shops, pharmacies and other situations where their ability to maintain physical distancing is affected.

**We can now confirm that people who have been asked to shield can meet people from one other household outside from Friday 19 June.**

Outdoor Activity

From Thursday 18 June, we advise that you can go outdoors for exercise such as a walk, wheel, run or cycle. From Friday 19 June, you can also take part in non-contact outdoor activities such as golf, hiking, canoeing, outdoor swimming, fishing etc.

If you can, you should:

* maintain strict physical distancing at all times, even if you live with the person you’re out with. This means keeping 2 metres (or three steps) away from other people at all times
* choose times and areas that are quiet
* wash your hands for at least 20 seconds as soon as you get back home

Meeting Family and Friends

From Friday 19 June, you can meet up with another household outdoors, including in gardens, following advice on physical distancing and hand hygiene. You should not meet more than 7 people at once, nor with people from more than 1 household per day.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the change?**

From Thursday 18 June 2020, the advice for people that have been asked to shield is:

* You can go outside to exercise or be active
* You cannot enter other indoor areas
* Strict physical distancing and hand hygiene is strongly advised

From Friday 19 June 2020, the advice for people that have been asked to shield is:

* You can take part in non-contact outdoor activities such as golf, hiking, canoeing, outdoor swimming, fishing etc.
* You can meet one other household per day outdoors, as long as there are no more than 8 people in the group
* You cannot go inside other buildings or meet other people inside

It is really important that you keep a physical distance of two metres from others and practise strict hand hygiene.

There is **no** change to the support offered to those who are shielding. If you have been getting support or food deliveries this will continue until at least 31 July.

**Does this apply to everyone who has been advised to shield?**

This advice applies to most people of all ages who are shielding, including children and pregnant women.

It also applies to those shielding because they are waiting on an organ transplant. Those who are shielding **and** awaiting a solid organ transplant are advised to strictly follow this advice and contact their transplant team to discuss whether specific recommendations in addition to this updated advice should be in place for them.

However, this advice does **not** apply to those who live in a residential nursing or care home.

**Why has this change been made now?**

When we were first faced with Covid-19, we knew very little about how likely it was to spread and who might be most at risk. Now that we have much more information, we can give more informed advice.

Firstly, we now know that the risks from being outside and catching the virus that causes Covid-19 are very low indeed. This is because studies have shown daylight kills the virus very quickly, within minutes. So the chance of getting the infection from objects outside that have been touched by somebody else is very small.

Secondly, we have been monitoring the number of cases of Covid-19 within the community. This number has been dropping steadily over the last 4 weeks, which means the number of people who are infectious is very low – the latest estimate is less than 1 in 2750 people. Both these factors have allowed us to recommend this change, which will be of benefit to mental and physical health and wellbeing.

**How long can I stay outside?**

There is no time limit for how long people can stay outside. The important thing is to stay two metres away from other people and avoid crowded places or busy times. You should always wash your hands for at least 20 seconds when you return indoors.

**What can I do outside?**

You can do whatever level of exercise feels comfortable for you. It is important to consider that if you have not been exercising for the last few months you may wish to take things slowly at first.

We advise that:

* from Thursday 18 June, you can go outdoors for a walk, wheel, run or cycle
* from Friday 19 June, you can take part in non-contact outdoor activities such as golf, hiking, canoeing, outdoor swimming, fishing, etc.
* should try to maintain strict physical distancing at all times, even if you live with the person you’re out with. This means keeping 2 metres (or 3 steps) away from other people at all times
* should try to choose times and areas that are quiet
* wash your hands for at least 20 seconds as soon as you get back home

**How far can I go outside?**

The Scottish government is asking people to stay within their local area (broadly within 5 miles) for the purposes of exercise and leisure. This is the same for people who have been asked to shield. You can travel in a car, either driving yourself or being driven by someone you live with. Do not go in a car with people you do not live with.

**Why is the advice to keep 2 metres apart from others?**

The main route of transmission of Covid-19 is from droplets spread from an infected person when they cough. Studies have shown that the risk of getting the infection from such droplets is very small if you are 2 metres or more away, as they will have fallen to the ground before they reach you. This is why general advice has been to allow groups of no more than 8 to meet up outside while staying 2 metres apart.

**Does this advice apply to children and young people?**

Yes. The advice should be followed in a way which is right for the age of your child or young person. It is important that there should be supervision, if needed, from a parent or a carer to make sure physical distancing is followed. Please make sure they wash their hands for at least 20 seconds as soon as they come back in.

**Can I go shopping or to the chemist?**

No, at the moment the guidance is still that you cannot go inside other buildings. The virus can survive much longer indoors which is why we are limiting the advice to being outdoors.

**Can I go back to work?**

Unless you can work from home, we advise that you should not be going into work at the moment. It is important that people who have been asked to shield stay 2 metres away from other people and do not go inside any other buildings.

**Will this advice change again?**

Like everything this advice will be kept under continual review. If it is felt that community transmission has increased and it is no longer as safe for people who have been asked to shield to go outside and meet other household members then this decision will be reviewed. However, if we are confident that transmission remains well controlled we hope that people who have been asked to shield will be able to do more.

**What other sources of support are available to me?**

We understand that these are worrying and uncertain times. You may find it helpful to visit the <https://clearyourhead.scot/> website.

The national Covid-19 helpline continues to operate. Please contact 0800 111 4000 if you need any support with shielding.

**Information for healthcare colleagues on the recent change in recommendations for people who have been asked to shield**

After a review of the latest scientific information about transmission of COVID-19 and how the virus behaves in different settings the recommendations for people who have been asked to shield has changed.

The new recommendations are that people who have been asked to shield can:

* go outside to exercise (from Thursday 18 June 2020)
* meet members of one other household per day, maximum group of eight people (from Friday 19 June 2020)

These changes will be announced to the public on 18 June at the Scottish Government coronavirus daily briefing, through the SMS Shielding Service and on the Scottish Government website. This advice will be reviewed on 31 July or sooner if new evidence emerges.

This advice applies to most people of all ages who are shielding, including children and pregnant women. It also applies to those shielding because they are waiting on an organ transplant.

However the advice does **not** apply to those who live in a residential nursing or care home.

Following advice from transplant colleagues in Scotland, those who are shielding and awaiting a solid organ transplant are advised to strictly observe this advice and contact their transplant team to discuss whether specific recommendations in addition to this updated advice should be in place for them.

When we were first faced with COVID-19, we knew very little about how likely it was to spread and the threats it posed to different people. Now we have much more information, we can make give more informed advice.

Firstly, we now know that the risks from being outside and catching COVID-19 are very low indeed. This is because studies have shown daylight inactivates the virus that causes COVID-19 very rapidly, within minutes (<https://academic.oup.com/jid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/infdis/jiaa274/5841129>). So the chance of acquiring the infection from objects outside that have been touched by somebody else is negligible.

Secondly, we have been monitoring the number of cases of COVID-19 within the community. This number has been dropping steadily over the last 4 weeks, which means the number of people who are potentially infectious is very low – the latest estimate is less than 1 in 2750 people. Both these factors have allowed us to recommend this change, which will be of benefit to mental and physical health and wellbeing of people who have been asked to shield.

Updated guidance will be added to the Scottish Government and NHS Inform websites.

The advice about how people who have been asked to shield can access healthcare has not changed and is summarised in the CMO letter:

<https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/cmo/DC20200413Shielding.pdf>

The pertinent bit is copied below:

***11. Patient Access to Healthcare***

*It is vital that people who are being shielded get the care they need when they require it in the safest way possible. This may be routine or urgent primary (or secondary) care. To ensure this happens in a safe and timely manner their needs should be assessed by a clinician and then a risk assessment done to determine where, when and how the patient is seen.*

*In some circumstances you may decide that it is appropriate to carry out a consultation over the telephone or via NHS Near Me. For NHS Near Me all that is needed for the patient is a device that has a camera (e.g. smartphone, tablet, laptop) and connection to the internet.*

*A face to face consultation may be required by way of a home visit, but equally after assessment of infection risk, clinical need and service capacity may involve the patient travelling to a practice or centre to be seen. This risk assessment is part of the care that GPs and other health professionals do every day to meet the needs of their patients and should continue whilst bearing in mind the special requirements of patients who are shielding.*

It is hoped that in time further recommendations will be made to increase the freedoms for people who have been asked to shield. However, if there is an increase in community transmission then all decisions will be reviewed. Any changes in recommendations will be carefully considered, dependant on the science and communicated in advance to healthcare colleagues and people who have been asked to shield.