

## **Information for healthcare colleagues on the recent change in recommendations for shielded patients**

After a review of the latest scientific information about transmission of COVID-19 and how the virus behaves in different settings the recommendations for patients who are shielded has changed. The new recommendation is that patients who are shielded can go outside for limited exercise. They can go outdoors for a walk, wheel, run or cycle. We do not recommend that they take part in outdoor activities such as golf, hiking, canoeing, outdoor swimming, angling, etc. in the same way as the rest of the population can just now. This new recommendation is due to start on the **18<sup>th</sup> June 2020**, providing viral transmission rates remain low. This will be confirmed 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<sup>st</sup> July or sooner if new evidence emerges, and applies to people of all ages who are shielded, including pregnant women and children who are shielded, but does not include those who live in a residential or nursing home.

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 fewer than 1 in 500 people. Both these factors have allowed us to recommend this change, which will be of benefit to mental and physical health and well-being of shielded patients.

Updated guidance for patients will be added to the Scottish Government website this week and will be available on NHS Inform from 18 June.

All shielded patients have been sent a letter informing them of this change, they will still be able to access all the help and support they had previously.

The advice about how shielded patients 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 shielded people. 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 shielded patients.

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