

17 April 2020

SHIELDING UPDATE FOR NHSGGC PRACTICES

ACTION REQUIRED ON 20 APRIL 2020

This letter provides an update on Shielding and next steps for practices. The key actions for practices are:

- To identify the small number of additional patients who may have been missed by the national and local searches by using the ESCRO search process described below
 - To notify COVIDshielding@ggc.scot.nhs.uk of the CHI number of any patients identified through this process
 - To continue contacting any patients who have received shielding letters for a discussion and support
 - To deal with enquiries from patients on an individual basis
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Dear colleagues,

Further to my letter of 13 April I'm writing with a further update on shielding. I'm pleased to say that with the support of prescribing colleagues and external partners we have built a suite of searches which are now available in your systems. These run searches on the ESCRO reporting database for practice prescribing and diagnostic codes.

Searches have been run remotely and data extracted centrally for ISD in relation to the specific shielding criteria originally set out. However, the recent addition of a number of diagnoses require further clinical judgement in terms of severity and associated risk from Covid19. We are therefore asking practices to review a small number of patients identified by the searches. By reviewing these now we hope to reduce work in the future for practices, by reducing the number of patients shielding unnecessarily.

Identifying additional patients in your practice

Summary

- The new ESCRO search utility should be downloaded from Monday 20 April www.escro.co.uk/EScro_Shielding/Escro_Shielding.htm
- Practices should review the **Additional searches to review** tab.

- For those patients without a shielding date (the date the code was added), please review the associated factors by clicking the patient's name and reviewing the list in the lower part of the screen.
- For the group of patients in this list who you consider would benefit from shielding, record their CHI and return the list to COVIDShielding@ggc.scot.nhs.uk

The ESCRO search tool

The ESCRO database sits behind your practice information system and can be searched for prescribing and coding information on the patient population. The prescribing support team has prepared a user guide to help practices access the ESCRO searches. This is enclosed with this letter. Even if you have previously used the Scottish Therapeutics Utility (STU), you need to download and install the new ESCO utility as per the enclosed guidance.

When you open the ESCRO utility you should see 6 tabs. Each of these tabs will show a list of patients. If they have already been identified as Shielding patients and have had a letter issued, you will see the date of this in the shielding date column.

- **Transplant recipients** – search for the agreed transplant DMARDs and READ codes for transplants.
- **Severe respiratory conditions** – based on the ISD/PHS prescribing guidance. We have added in the READ code for cystic fibrosis, although we expect that most of these patients will already have been identified via secondary care.
- **Immunosuppressive therapies** – including searches for steroids, DMARDs and prescribing within the practice which meets the criteria as set out in the flowchart for group 5.
- **Additional searches for review** – this group includes a much wider group of READ code searches for respiratory conditions such as sarcoidosis, pulmonary hypertension, COPD, bronchiectasis, emphysema, severe asthma, some pneumoconioses, and interstitial lung diseases, and a wider set of prescribing searches. It is based on guidance from Asthma UK and the British Thoracic Society.
- **All shielding patients** – a handy tab that shows your current shielding coded patients.
- **All search patients** – a composite of all patients the tool has identified across all tabs.

Ask from practices in the week starting Monday 20 April

Please download and run the tool found at www.escro.co.uk/EScro_Shielding/EScro_Shielding.htm

Review the '**additional searches to review**' tab. If any patients on this list have a date shown in the shielding date column, they have already been issued with a shielding letter. Patients who do not have a date in this column should be reviewed to consider if the severity of their condition is sufficient to warrant shielding. If you do identify patients from this list who you consider would benefit from shielding, please provide their CHI number to covidshielding@ggc.scot.nhs.uk naming the file as 'additional searches for shielding' with your practice code.

You can also issue a shielding letter to these patients in advance of them getting their national letter, and have a discussion with them as you would with other patients on your shielding list. If you do issue a letter, please warn the patient that they will receive a further letter via the central process.

You may notice that in the other tabs such as transplant DMARDS, severe respiratory and immunosuppression therapies, there are patients who are showing as not yet having been issued with a shielding letter. We will extract these patients' details and arrange their shielding letter directly in order to allow practices to focus on the fourth tab, additional searches to review. The **additional searches tab** that we are asking practices to focus on will **not be extracted**, and so we need practices to work on this and deliver the CHIs for further patients who require shielding by the close of business on Friday 24 April.

We appreciate that some patients will be registered with NHSGGC practices, but resident in other health boards. We will process and return all CHI data in a similar fashion. Please remember that the local authority support will come from their area of residence.

I appreciate that this request creates work for the practice. I have tried to balance this against the likely work avoided by removing patients who might be harmed by an inappropriate shielding letter and require to be communicated with and then subsequently removed from the list once they receive a central letter. In reviewing the patients identified practices may well consider who else might be missing from shielding lists. If there are any suggested improvements to the search strategies, please let us know.

Patients who may have been missed from the searches but who may need to shield

As mentioned before, these searches never substitute for doctors who know their patients well. I would encourage practices to identify additional patients who will not have been picked up by the searches, and to directly provide a shielding letter. The searches are as effective as we can make them in the limited time available, but they are not perfect. In normal times this endeavour may well have taken a year to deliver. We are not in normal times, and time is critical. We have used our best endeavours, but it is important to realise that the searches have limitations. The advice remains the same as in the previous letter. If you identify further patients who you consider require to shield, issue a letter, code locally and add these CHIs to an excel sheet and return it to the covid shielding email address. For this specific group of patients please code as 'additional patients for shielding' with the practice code in the file name.

Communication and patient concerns

I'm aware that a number of colleagues have emailed me with comments and questions. I am working my way through these. Apologies for the delay: I have been trying to finalise the search tool as a priority given the current situation. We have also received emails to the PCPH professional email address from patients, and we have received other patient enquiries where patients are seeking to complain about either shielding policy or decisions made in their practice. We are in discussions with Scottish Government about developing a way for patients to complain about policy issues in relation to shielding. For all clinical decisions, we are emphasising the importance of communication with their practice as clinical decision making by professionals who know their patients is the safest option in this complex process.

We recognise that patients may contact their GP practice directly if they have concerns, for example if they have not received a shielding letter and think they should have. We are asking GPs to have this discussion with individual patients as you will be best placed to understand their specific clinical condition and circumstances. If the patient does not meet the criteria for shielding, you do not need to add them to

the list. In such circumstances they will still require advice about social distancing and how they can best protect themselves. Please do not give patients the public health professional contact numbers as we will be unable to discuss individual patient issues.

As before, I'm grateful to you for your patience with this evolving and complex task. I'm very aware of the pressures on practices to provide or sometimes remove shielding status. Thank you for all that you are doing. I'm also grateful to Sean MacBride-Stewart, Andrew Morgan, Dave Kelly and Albasoft staff, Keith Mercer and Alex Potter as well as others outwith NHSGGC who have supported us in developing the searches and refining their operation.

If you have any concerns please contact me at pcph@ggc.scot.nhs.uk

Please stay safe.

Kindest wishes

John

John O'Dowd

Consultant in Public Health Medicine & GP

Encs 3

ESCO search user guide

Search strategy details document

Word template for practice-issued shielding letter.