

The Government's Shielded Patient Process – Advice for Patients

The Government has established a Shielded Patient process which identifies those who are most at risk from COVID-19 (Coronavirus) infection. These people are advised to stay at home and avoid face-to-face contact for at least 12 weeks.

We know that this is a big sacrifice. Therefore, only the highest risk groups of patients have been asked to shield.

Who is being advised to shield?

Medical experts have identified specific medical conditions that, based on what is already known about the virus, are at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

These clinically extremely vulnerable people may include:

1. **Solid organ transplant recipients.**
2. **Cancer patients**, specifically those who:
 - a. Are undergoing active chemotherapy
 - b. Have lung cancer and are undergoing radical radiotherapy
 - c. Have cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
 - d. Are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
 - e. Have other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
 - f. Those who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.
3. **Patients with severe respiratory conditions**, including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
4. **People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism** that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell).
5. **People on immunosuppression therapies** sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
6. **Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease**, congenital or acquired.

How will I be identified as a 'shielded' patient?

There are four phases to the identification programme, as outlined below. This explains why people may be receiving letters at different times. The whole process is expected to be completed by the beginning of May 2020.

Phase 1	Patients identified as vulnerable on the basis of nationally held data.
Phase 2	Additional patients added, based on centrally extracted primary care (GP surgery) data.
Phase 3	Hospital Consultants and GPs review and revise centrally compiled lists based on local patient knowledge.
Phase 4	GP practices review a list of those individuals registered at their practice who have self-identified as very vulnerable via the gov.uk website. Those who are confirmed as high risk will be sent a 'shielding' letter.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: I haven't had a letter to say that I am at high risk (shielded). How can I be added to this group?

Practices are currently following National Guidance working with NHS Digital and secondary care providers (Wye Valley Trust) to identify all patients that fall into the high-risk category. We expect that these processes will have been completed by the end of April so patients may still receive letters up until the beginning of May. If you have not yet done so, please register on the gov.uk website (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable>) where information is then shared with practices to identify you as shielded (see Phase 4 above).

Q2: I have just started new treatment/been diagnosed with a condition which puts me into the high risk (shielded) group. Will I be sent a letter?

The process of identifying shielded patients is continuous. Any patients with a recent diagnosis will either be written to by secondary care (Wye Valley Trust) or their GP depending where the diagnosis was made. This information will be shared with NHS Digital so that you will be included on the Government's shielding support offer. Your patient records at your GP Practice will also be updated.

Q3. I received a letter to say that I was at high risk but now I have been contacted by my GP Practice to say that I don't fall into this category (see Phase 3 above). What support is available locally to me?

Talk Community are supporting Herefordshire residents.

Create your own personal plan

Think about the support you will need and those who can help you while you self-isolate. This could include family, friends or trusted members of your community. Your plan might include support with things usually taken for granted such as shopping, picking up medication, someone to check in on you or someone to just have a chat with.

Contact us if you need further support

If there are gaps in your personal plan and you need further support, please contact the Herefordshire Council Talk Community team using the details below.

Telephone: 01432 260027 or Email talkcommunitycovidresponse@herefordshire.gov.uk

Q4. I have received more than one letter to say that I am shielded; why is this?

The Government identified the first cohort of shielded patients through national data available to them (see Phase 1 and Phase 2 above). As this data is not complete, they also asked secondary care providers and GP Practices to identify patients who meet the shielded criteria and to also write to patients (Phase 3 above). Consequently, you may have received a letter from the Government, your consultant, and/or your GP Practice. NHS Digital are working with secondary care providers and GP Practices over the next few weeks to combine all of these lists to ensure that the Government Scheme and your GP Practice has complete lists. This process is expected to be complete by the beginning of May. Following that, there will be weekly updates with any changes (additions/removals) of patients from these lists.

Q5. How can I access regular welfare calls by the Social Prescribing Team?

Due to the current situation with COVID-19 and as with many teams, our Social Prescribers have changed the way they are supporting patients. As many community groups are not running at the moment, the team are supporting patients by making regular welfare calls. In addition to patients who were already being supported by the team, GPs have identified their patients who are most vulnerable and isolated who the Social Prescribers have contacted to see if they need any further support.

As the isolation period progresses many people who live on their own, struggle with anxiety, are caring for loved ones or are worried about the current situation find that a friendly phone call can help reassure and calm them down. The Social Prescribers make initial contact and then a joint decision is made between the Social Prescriber and the patient as to how often they would like the link worker to call. These calls also give us the opportunity to touch base with patients on a regular basis and make sure the support initially put in place is still working well, and if not, we can alert Talk Community to ensure that the practical needs of the patient are met.

Referrals can be made from the Talk Community Team to the Social Prescribing team via the Lead Social Prescriber.

Additional sources of help and advice

We hope that we have answered all of your questions about the Shielded Patient process. You may also find the following sources of information helpful.

Advice for everyone (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>)

People at highest clinical risk - NHS England Frequently Asked Questions for Patients

(<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/20200401-FAQs-Patients.pdf>) – link to PDF information document

Information for Neurology Patients (https://www.theabn.org/page/covid-19_patients)

Information for Gastroenterology Patients (<https://www.bsg.org.uk/people/patients/>)

- **Gastrointestinal condition** (<https://gutscharity.org.uk/news-and-events/>)
- **IBD or Crohn's and Colitis** (<https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk/news/advice-for-people-with-crohns-and-colitis-self-isolation-social-distancing>)

Information for Kidney Disease Patients (<https://www.kidneycareuk.org/news-and-campaigns/coronavirus-advice/>)

Information for Rheumatology Patients

- **How patients are identified for shielding** (https://www.rheumatology.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Rheumatology_advice_coronavirus_immunosuppressed_patients_220320.pdf?ver=2020-03-22-155745-717 – link to PDF information document)
- **Coronavirus and arthritis** (<https://www.versusarthritis.org/>)

Dermatology

- **How patients are identified for shielding** (<https://www.bad.org.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?itemtype=document&id=6674> – link to PDF information document)

Patients with Respiratory Conditions

- **Pulmonary Hypertension** (<https://www.phauk.org/coronavirus-pulmonary-hypertension/>)
- **Sarcoidosis** (<https://www.sarcoidosisuk.org/information-hub/coronavirus-faq/>)
- **Asthma** (<https://www.asthma.org.uk/coronavirus/>)
- **British Lung Foundation** (<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus>)

Advice for pregnant women (<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>)

Advice for patients with Heart disease (<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/news/coronavirus-and-your-health>)

Advice for Stroke survivor patients (<https://www.stroke.org.uk/finding-support/information-coronavirus-stroke-survivors>)

Advice for cancer patients (<https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cancer-in-general/coronavirus-and-cancer>)

Talk Community (https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/info/200207/family_support/883/coronavirus)

The Talk Community COVID-19 response team has been set up to provide help and support where it's most needed in Herefordshire. The response team is made up from volunteers based around the county. Talk Community know this is a worrying and challenging time for many, so in response to the outbreak of COVID-19 they are working with community organisations and local businesses to help connect people to support in their local area.