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Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Important shielding advice for people with specific cancers

This leaflet provides you and your family with information about changes to shielding. It is for people with certain types of cancer.

If you are part of the shielding group you will have received a letter from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) or been contacted by your doctor.

People with certain cancers are considered to be at the highest risk of severe illness if they become infected with coronavirus. They are:

- People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy. Or people who have had radical radiotherapy for lung cancer.
- People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow who are at any stage of treatment. This includes cancers such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma.
- People with cancer who are having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments.
- People with cancer who are having other specialised, targeted treatments which can affect the immune system. This includes protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.
- People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months. Or people who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.

If you think you have coronavirus (COVID-19)

Although it is highly unlikely you will catch coronavirus (COVID-19) you should watch out for symptoms. The most common symptoms are a new continuous cough, loss of sense of smell or taste and/or a fever/high temperature (37.8 °C or greater).

A new continuous cough is where you:

- have a new cough that's lasted for an hour
- have had 3 or more episodes of coughing in 24 hours
- are coughing more than usual

A high temperature is feeling hot to the touch on your chest or back (you don't need to measure your temperature). You may feel warm, cold or shivery.

Some people will have more serious symptoms, including pneumonia or difficulty breathing, which might require admission to hospital.

If, at any point, you think you have developed symptoms of coronavirus, phone the National Cancer Treatment Helpline for further advice (0800 917 7711). Please also inform your clinical team.

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

Where can I call for support?

If you are worried about symptoms you should call your existing cancer treatment helpline or the national Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711.

If you do not have access to family or community support or online access, please call 0800 111 4000 to receive support.

- For general information about COVID-19 call 0800 028 2816
- Cancer Research UK call 0808 800 4040 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
- Macmillan Cancer Support call 0808 808 00 00 (every day, 9am - 5pm)

The NHS Inform Scotland website has up-to-date information and answers to frequently asked questions: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus>

The Scottish Cancer Coalition, a group of charities who support those with cancer, are providing a range of support services from mental wellbeing to financial and welfare advice. You can find a summary of their services on Voluntary Health Scotland.

<https://vhscotland.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support-resources-during-covid-19/>

For other non-emergency health concerns, your first point of contact should still be your GP or 111. They are likely to assess you over the telephone or via video link rather than in person to reduce the risk of infection from coronavirus (COVID-19).

Pausing Shielding

Shielding was paused on 1 August. This is because the levels of infection in Scotland are low enough for us to do this.

This means that in general, people who have been shielding can now follow the same advice as the rest of Scotland.

The number of people in Scotland with coronavirus is much lower. However, people who have been asked to shield still have the same risk if they become infected with the virus.

You should continue to strictly follow physical distancing and hygiene measures. You may also want to think about the levels of risk associated with what you are choosing to do. You can then decide how comfortable you are with that risk

Full details on what you can do from the 1 August can be found here:

www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding

You can also find the advice for the rest of Scotland here:

www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-what-you-can-and-cannot-do

This guidance will be kept updated with any changes.

Changes to support

Now that shielding is paused, the [weekly grocery boxes](#) have stopped.

[Priority access to supermarket online delivery slots](#) will continue to anyone who had signed up before 31 July.

Your local authority will be able to offer more support if you cannot afford food. You can contact them via the free national helpline on 0800 111 4000.

Keeping informed

Even though shielding is paused, we will continue to provide information and advice.

You will be able to access help and support online and we will continue to update this.

Different things matter to different people. We want to help you to make informed choices based on your own individual circumstances. Our online support includes:

- [this guidance about the conditions for the six main shielding categories](#)
- [guides to help you understand what sort of activities are safer than others](#)
- [tools to help you protect yourself during daily activities](#)
- a [workplace risk assessment tool](#) to help you consider your individual risk when returning to work
- guidance on [returning to school](#)

If you are a patient with cancer, on treatment or who has recently completed treatment, then the general advice regarding returning to work when Shielding recommendations are paused may not be appropriate for you. In particular, continuing to work, or returning to work while undergoing treatment for cancer may not be advisable for you. This is because of the treatment you are on and is not related to Covid-19.

We recommend that you contact your own clinical team for additional guidance.

We will also keep sending updates through the [SMS Shielding Service](#), which will include a new Covid forecasting service for shielding. This will allow people who have been shielding to sign up to an SMS update that tells them about their risk of being exposed to Covid in their local area.

The SMS Shielding Service and the national helpline will be available for as long as it is needed. If it's no longer needed, we'll give you plenty of notice that it's ending.

If the infection rate in Scotland goes up

The infection rate in Scotland may rise as well as fall in the coming months. Small changes will not affect this advice, but if we start to see an increase in the infection rate that concerns us, we may advise you to take extra steps to stay safe. If we need to, we'll let you know by letter and through the SMS Shielding Service.

As we keep on improving our knowledge about COVID-19, we're also reviewing evidence about who needs to take extra steps to stay safe. If we find out about a change that affects you, we will contact you.

Personal clinical advice

Before the virus, clinicians advised some individuals to avoid doing certain things. This is because of their specific health condition or specific treatments. You should continue to follow any specific advice that your clinician provides. This is because they know you personally.

This does not mean you are being advised to shield again because of an increase of coronavirus. You should discuss this with your healthcare team if you are unsure about any health advice.

Lowering your risk

Now the virus is under control it is safer for people who have been shielding to return to day to day life.

Our ['Quick Guide to Risk'](#) sheet lists examples of everyday activities that are 'low risk' and 'higher risk'. There are also [things you can do to lower your risk](#). We'd advise you to keep these risks in mind when choosing what to do and where to go.

There are ways to lower your risk of exposure to the virus as you start doing more activities outside your home. It is important to:

- follow physical distancing guidance and keep 2 metres away from people – except from people you live with or are in your extended household group
- wear face coverings inside shops and on public transport
- wash your hands regularly and for at least 20 seconds
- clean hard surfaces
- cover your mouth to cough either into a tissue you can dispose of straightaway or into a bent elbow
- try to avoid touching your face as much as you can
- avoid contact with anyone who has the symptoms of COVID-19

Face coverings

Face coverings reduce the risk of the wearer passing on the infection. This is why it is now mandatory to wear face coverings inside shops and on public transport. We recommend that you wear a face covering when physical distancing is difficult. The best way to lower your risk is to maintain physical distancing as much as possible. It is also best to avoid busy or crowded places.

There could be reasons why you may not be able to wear a face covering. This could be because a face covering would cause you difficulty, pain or severe distress. This might be due to a health condition or disability.

Frequently Asked Questions about coronavirus (COVID-19)

What should I know about Coronavirus (COVID-19) and cancer treatment?

If you are receiving treatment for cancer, it is important that you take extra care of your overall wellbeing, and continuing to attend hospital appointments may be part of this.

Your clinical team will try to minimise the time you spend in hospital departments, for example arranging telephone or Near Me video consultations and offering blood tests at a different NHS site. Make sure your care provider has your up-to-date contact details.

Your specialist or one of their team may contact you to change your appointment. If you have not been contacted, **please assume that the appointment is to go ahead as arranged.**

If you have the symptoms of a possible Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection then do not come to the hospital. Instead you should check your symptoms against the information on NHS Inform and call the National Cancer Helpline for further advice (0800 917 7711). Please also inform your clinical team.

Can friends and family visit me in hospital?

Yes, each person in hospital is allowed to have one Designated Visitor. A Designated Visitor is someone you would like to be your named visitor. This might be your spouse, next of kin or a friend.

You can change your designated visitor. Visiting will be arranged with you via the care team looking after you. Visits will be made by pre-arranged appointments to ensure the number of people in the hospital at any one time is limited to maintain a safe physical distance.

Your visitors should not bring in food parcels, flowers, helium balloons or similar items. More information about visiting loved ones in hospital can be found here:

[Hospital Visiting Leaflet](#)

If you are likely to go to hospital, please remember to pack your mobile phone and phone charger so you can keep in touch with relatives and friends.

As Lockdown is lifted, should I assume my treatment will return to normal?

As lockdown restrictions are eased in Scotland, it does not mean that the virus is completely gone. The virus will stay with us for some time to come, and the risk associated with it will relate to the number of cases in Scotland.

As the risk reduces, a number of cancer services will aim to return to full capacity- from screening programmes to radiotherapy and surgery. However, due to the build-up of deferred treatments during the first phase of the pandemic and the new

measures in place to reduce the risk of transmission (e.g. more time to clean surgery theatres), the available appointments for services may be oversubscribed.

There may also be a need to attend a different hospital than normal to receive your diagnosis or treatment due to the reduced availability of appointments, physical distancing requirements and to see you as early as possible. It is important you still attend these appointments if you can.

We understand that as an individual receiving services for cancer (screening, diagnostic, or treatments), you will be very anxious to receive these as soon as it is safe to do so. A national group of leading clinicians have established clinical frameworks in order to prioritise based on the severity of an individual's disease. Those with the most critical prognosis will be progressed first into receiving treatment. This will ensure we are helping people in order of most urgent need of treatment.

What if I could receive my treatment from another health board before my own board can offer the service?

The Scottish Government requires each health board across Scotland to use the same framework to prioritise patients receiving treatment. In order for patients to receive treatments as soon as it is possible, in a safe manner, there may be a need for the patient to travel to another board.

Generally patients who are fit enough to receive a treatment (e.g. surgery) will usually be fit enough for some travel within Scotland. This will help to alleviate the pressure on certain boards and will ensure patients are being seen and receiving the best treatment at the earliest possible time. The vast majority of patients will be treated in their local board or region.

What should I do if I become unwell while on treatment for cancer?

If you are on treatment for cancer, it is very important to phone for advice if you become unwell.

Remember: symptoms can start for reasons other than COVID-19. Any cancer patient worried about symptoms should call their existing **cancer treatment helpline or the national Cancer Treatment Helpline 0800 917 7711**. They will ask a series of questions and will give advice or arrange for you to have a medical review at your nearest hospital.

If you have chest pain, significant bleeding or you need immediate medical attention call 999.

I am the parent/ carer of a child with cancer. What should I do if they have a high temperature?

As a parent or carer of a child or young person with cancer, you may be aware that guidance has been issued nationally that people who have cancer and are receiving active chemotherapy and/or have leukaemia or lymphoma, should follow shielding

guidance. It is therefore very understandable that you may have experienced worries about bringing your child to hospital in case of exposure to the virus. However, children and young people on chemotherapy are at risk of serious bacterial infection which can be overwhelming. **It is therefore essential that you please do not delay in reporting a temperature to your clinical team and attending for treatment.**

There is a well-established pathway through Accident and Emergency for children with temperatures and all appropriate measures are in place to protect children from exposure to COVID 19. Staff are wearing the correct PPE at the correct time and will be following recent advice to wear facemasks at all times.

If you are the parent or carer of a child or young person with cancer you will be particularly anxious about what you should and can do to help and protect them at this time. Alongside the clinical advice provided in this leaflet there is further advice available on the [Parent Club webpage](#) on how to support your child at this difficult time.

Do people who live with me need to do anything differently to keep me safe?

You and your household should continue to follow strict physical distancing and hygiene measures. All members of your household must [self-isolate](#) if someone develops COVID-19 symptoms.

How do I stay safe whilst visiting people?

You can now meet people both indoors and outdoors, with physical distancing. This can include overnight stays. This can be at different times and can also be different households each day.

When meeting people from other households:	When meeting people inside:	When meeting people outside:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maximum of 4 other households per day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 8 people from 2 other households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 15 people from 4 other households
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stay 2 at least metres away from anyone you do not live with • wear a face covering if it is not possible to maintain physical distancing • do not share food or utensils – each household should bring and eat their own food • do not meet with anyone who has coronavirus symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everyone should wash their hands as soon as they arrive, often during their visit and again as soon as they get home • avoid touching hard surfaces such as door handles and bannisters with your hands • sit away from people you do not live with • open the windows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose times and areas that are quiet • avoid touching hard surfaces such as gates, walls and park benches with your hands • wash your hands for at least 20 seconds as soon as you get home

You can now also choose to [attend larger gatherings](#). This includes weddings, funerals and worship. The more people you come into contact with, the higher the risk is of being exposed to the virus. Please think about this when deciding to attend a larger gathering.

If you receive essential care from friends or family members, these carers can continue to visit, unless they have any of the symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). Essential care includes things like help with washing, dressing, or preparing meals.

If you need help with care but you're not sure who to contact please visit: <https://careinfoscotland.scot/topics/how-to-get-care-services>

How do I stay safe whilst outdoors?

Before leaving home, plan how you will keep safe and minimise risk by considering:

- taking an alcohol-based hand rub (hand sanitiser) with you
- taking tissues and a separate bag to keep used tissues
- taking a face covering
- choosing times and areas that are quiet

When outdoors, try to:

- use a hand sanitiser often, especially before eating or after touching surfaces
- stay at least 2 metres away from anyone you do not live with
- wear a face covering if it is not possible to maintain physical distancing
- avoid touching hard surfaces such as gates, walls, fences and park benches with your hands as much as possible
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds as soon as you get home

Some business in the retail and hospitality sections are now able to introduce 1 metre zones. This is only allowed if the business takes [steps to reduce risks](#) to keep their customers safe. There will be clear signage outside the building. You may want to avoid entering if you do not feel comfortable.

Our '[Quick Guide to Risk](#)' sheet lists examples of everyday activities that are 'low risk' and 'higher risk'. There are also [things you can do to lower your risk](#). We'd advise you to keep these risks in mind when choosing what to do and where to go.

Can I use public transport?

You can choose to use public transport. To lower your risk, try to:

- avoid travelling at peak times when it will be busy
- put on your face covering before getting on public transport
- avoid touching any handle rails or wiping them before use
- sit near an open window if you can
- wash your hands as soon as you can once you get to your destination

Transport Scotland have provided more [detailed travel guidance](#).

How can I stay safe when staying in holiday accommodation?

You can choose to stay in any type of holiday accommodation and travel to second homes. This can be with the people who live with, or people in your extended household.

Self-catering accommodation includes anywhere that does not have shared facilities. It must also be accessible via an external door.

We have produced [guidance for the hospitality industry](#) which includes hygiene precautions. This includes regular disinfection of objects and surfaces that are touched regularly. You may wish to check what hygiene measures are in place with the provider beforehand.

How can I maintain positive mental health?

You can now book GP and NHS appointments as normal. If you feel worried and want to speak to someone, your GP or other healthcare provider can help make sure you get the support you need.

You can also find help online from the Scottish Association of Mental Health (SAMH) at www.samh.org.uk and over the phone from:

- Breathing Space - 0800 83 85 87
- Samaritans - 116 123

NHS Inform also has resources to help your mental wellbeing:
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>