



## **COVID-19 and 'shielding'.**

The correct name for the virus is SARS-coronavirus-2 and the disease it causes is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). SARS means Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. Throughout the document this new (novel) disease will be referred to as COVID-19.

This document is intended to provide general information and is not intended to replace medical advice. Prostate Scotland cannot give individual advice or recommend which treatments might be suitable for an individual or recommend individual medical care or health professionals – patients should always check with their urologist, oncologist, CNS or GP regarding treatments.

As the following is general information, guidance and procedures for each health board may be slightly different. If you have been given specific advice from your urologist, oncologist, CNS or GP then you should always follow their advice.

We have compiled this information on COVID-19 and shielding (on this linked page, you can also download the 2 page PDF document that gives the shielding route map) to the best of our knowledge and understanding at the present time. As the situation changes and as more knowledge and information become available, this information and guidance may change. We will try to keep you as up to date as possible.

### **Shielding – what is it, why is it essential and the recent changes to this guidance**

For those people who are at very high risk of severe illness additional protection measures are advised which involved minimising all interaction between them and others (called shielding). It was announced on 23.7.20, that shielding will be paused as from **1.8.20**.

**Please read on for more details on the changes to the guidance on shielding from **24.7.20** .**

People who fall into the shielding category will be contacted by the NHS by letter or email. Some people may find that they receive more than one letter if they have multiple 'shielding' conditions. 'Shielding' applies to men who are being treated by chemotherapy or on immunotherapy for their prostate cancer.

If you discover that you are not on the "very vulnerable" list and don't receive a letter, but think you should be, you should contact your GP, or you can register via the NHS111 website to receive a letter. Having this letter might be helpful in terms of getting priority for home deliveries etc.

More information on shielding is available on the NHS Inform website here. If it would be helpful, then an easy-read guide about shielding can be found here on the Scottish Government website.

**An update on shielding in Scotland currently 23.7.20.**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July the Scottish Government confirmed that shielding in Scotland will be **paused** from **1.8.20**.

After **1.8.20**, you can follow the same guidance that everyone else in Scotland follows. You should stay still alert and be mindful of physical distancing, regular hand washing/hand sanitising, cleaning hard surfaces and of wearing a face covering if you're unable to stay 2 metres apart. This guidance is similar for those who are at heightened risk of COVID-19.

Because COVID-19 is still in our communities the infection rate in Scotland may rise as well as fall in the coming months. Although small changes in the infection rate will not affect the guidance, if there is an increase in infection rates that gives cause for concern, then guidance may change asking those shielding to take extra precautionary steps again to keep themselves safe. If this happens, you will receive a letter or SMS text message about the changes.

If you have not already signed up to the SMS text service, there is a guide on how to do this further on in the document. Even although you haven't signed up to the SMS text service at the moment, it would be very worthwhile considering signing up now. A COVID-19 forecasting service for shielding is being developed and people who have been shielding will be informed through the SMS text service about the risk of being exposed to COVID-19 in their local area.

The challenges and difficulties for people (and others in the household) who are shielding have been recognised so some additional changes have been announced. It would seem that the risk of catching COVID-19 outdoors is low. The infection rate has come down and as it has remained low this has enabled further changes to the guidance for those shielding.

You should get updates by a letter or if you have registered, an SMS text message to let you know about any changes.

Getting outdoors to take some exercise and meeting family and friends can have many benefits not only for your physical health but also your mental health.

### **Further changes to shielding**

It was confirmed on 23.7.20 that as **from 24.7.20**:

- You don't need to physically distance from people you live with
- You can meet **indoors** with up to **8** people from **2 households** but still following physical distancing
- Meet **outdoors** with up to **15** people from **4** other households outdoors with physical distancing
- You can use indoor toilets if visiting people indoors
- You can go to pubs and restaurants with outdoor areas but avoid going inside if you can
- You can go to indoor shops, pharmacies, indoor and outdoor markets, indoor and outdoor garden centres but you should wear a face covering
- You can make appointments to go to the hairdresser or barber, again you should wear a face covering

- You can visit indoor attractions such as museums, galleries, libraries, theatres and cinemas but you should wear a face covering
- You should continue to wear a face covering if you can't physically distance. Face coverings are now compulsory in shops and on public transport
- There is no limit on the distance that you can travel. You can use public transport wearing a face covering and you can now travel in a car with someone you don't live with
- You can book all types of holiday accommodation not just self-catering accommodation, or travel to a second home with people from another household
- Remember you can take part in outdoor activities such as golf, hiking, tennis, canoeing, outdoor swimming, angling where you can socially distance
- If you live alone, or you only live with children who are under 18, you can agree to form an extended household with one other household. This means that you are treated as being part of that household. You can visit each other indoors and stay over without physical distancing
- Adults who are shielding can provide childcare to children from within their extended household. Children who live with someone who is shielding can attend formal childcare providers
- Continue to work from home where possible.

For more information visit the Scottish Government [shielding](#) page and download the 2 page shielding route map.

These changes will most likely be very welcome to those who are shielding but you should be aware that the virus is still out there, even though the risk of catching COVID-19 is now low. To reduce the risk of catching the virus you should continue to:

- Continue to wash your hands regularly with soap and water (or hand sanitiser) especially when you get back home from a trip out
- Stay 2 metres (or 3 steps) away from other people when out and about
- Everyone should cover their mouths when they cough, and you should ensure you stay 2 metres away from anyone who is coughing
- Clean any hard surfaces regularly
- Think about when you're travelling so you can avoid rush hour
- Work from home if you can – the advice is still for you to stay at home and not go to work until at least 1<sup>st</sup> August.

### **As from 29.6.20**

Your GP can continue to provide support to you. As from the **29.6.20** this can include home visits where he/she thinks it is **essential/ necessary** to see you at home because of your health issue.

### **Going out**

It perhaps may seem a bit daunting to go outside when the world we lived in has changed. There is a range of NHS resources that you may find helpful, including [exercises to improve strength and balance](#) and [gentle exercises that can be performed while sitting](#). Paths for All have also produced a leaflet of [ten simple](#)

exercises. If you are in any doubt about how much exercise you can do and the type of exercises, then you can check with your GP or CNS at the hospital.

Further guidance about going out and about has been produced by the government:

1. A guide to help you understand what activities are safer than others can be found [here](#)
2. A tool to help you protect yourself during daily activities can be found [here](#)

The Government are continuing to look at other ways that shielding might change in the future. It is their intention to:

- Provide you with updated guidance about your condition(s) and what that means for your risk from COVID-19. This is likely to involve your doctor or urology or oncology team discussing your individual circumstances with you
- Help you understand the changing risk of infection in your area and how to reduce the risk of catching the virus yourself. A COVID forecasting service for shielding is being developed and people who have been shielding will be informed through the SMS text service about the risk of being exposed to COVID in their local area.
- Provide information that is up to date, easy to read, understand and above all, helpful
- Give you access to support that can help you make informed choices about your life
- Support you to put your choices into practice. Shielding may have had and still be having a huge impact on your life and the lives of your loved ones. It's important that you are given the chance to consider and make informed decisions about what matters to you
- Provide you with ways of being able to see/monitor the way the virus is changing in your local area so you know, what's happening around you, the risk of catching COVID-19 if you go out and about to exercise and give you practical advice on how to protect yourself.

Prostate Scotland will update the information on shielding when any new Government announcement on shielding is made.

You can also watch a video about shielding [here](#).

### **How to register with the SMS Shielding Service**

To register you need to have your CHI number. This can be found at the top of your shielding letter. Your CHI number (Community Health Index) is made up of 10 numbers and is specific to you. To register, you will have to text your CHI number to the special mobile number for the service: 07860 064 525. Take care when entering the numbers; if it's not correct you will get a text asking you to put the number in again. You will get an automatic reply back to say you're now registered.

This will be an important and useful way of keeping you up to date with any new information.

### **If you have cancer and feel unwell**

If you feel unwell and have had chemotherapy or radiotherapy for a cancer (including a blood cancer) within the last 6 weeks, you should phone either the emergency Scottish Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711 or the emergency number given to you by your consultant or specialist nurse. You should call even if you do

not think feeling unwell is due to coronavirus.

### **What about work when shielding?**

The advice is to stay at home and if possible, work from home. Your shielding letter will confirm to your employers that you have to stay at home.

Advice has already been given to employers that they need to make workplaces safe from the risk of catching COVID-19 for employees for a return to work safely on **1.8.20**.

If you go back to work, you should still follow the physical distancing guidelines.

Further guidance on going back to work after shielding can be found [here](#).

A [workplace risk assessment tool](#) to help people consider their individual risk when returning to work is also available.

### **What is test and protect?**

As the guidance has been relaxed for shielding, it may be helpful to know more about the **Test and Protect system**. Even following the shielding guidance, you just might come into contact with someone who later develops symptoms of COVID-19.

Everyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19, should self-isolate for 7 days. People who live in the same household as a person with symptoms should self-isolate for 14 days.

Should you, someone in your household or the 1 other household you have chosen to meet up with develop symptoms, then that person should contact the NHS to arrange to be tested for COVID-19. This can be done by calling **0800 028 2816** or **going online to NHS inform [here](#)**.

If that person later tests positive for COVID-19 he/she will be put in touch with their local contact tracing team to identify people that they have been in close contact with. All of these close contacts, will be asked to self-isolate for 14 days. This is because if you have caught the virus, it may take up to 14 days for it to develop into an illness.

If you find yourself in the situation of having been in contact with someone who has tested positive, then you should contact your GP to let him/her know the circumstances and ask for more advice.

### **About this information**

The information contained in this leaflet has been developed by Prostate Scotland and reviewed by members of our advisory group, PAGES.

Date: 13.8.20 © Prostate Scotland