



# COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and Cancer: Information if you are a patient or carer

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**This leaflet is for you if you have cancer or you care for someone who has cancer.**

COVID-19 is the illness caused by the new coronavirus first identified in China. It can cause a cough, a high temperature (37.8C or greater), and/or loss of sense of smell or taste. (Amended 8th June)

Generally, COVID-19 can cause worse symptoms in people whose immune systems do not work well, older people and people with long term conditions like cancer.



Your cancer treatment may change. This is to keep you safe, because the COVID-19 infection presents a new risk. Your medical team will discuss any changes with you. Some safer options might be delaying treatment or reducing the intensity of treatment.

**If you are on treatment for cancer or have received treatment in the past 6 weeks, it is very important to phone for advice if you become unwell.**

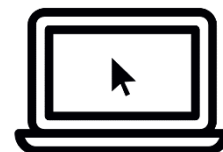


Any cancer patient worried about symptoms should call their existing **cancer treatment helpline or the national Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711.**

For individuals in a high risk group without 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.



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](#).





## 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.

Being visited by friends or relatives in hospital, or someone going with you to appointments is now restricted unless essential. The following visits are deemed essential:

- a person receiving end-of-life care
- to support someone with a mental health issue such as dementia, a learning disability or autism where not being present would cause the patient to be distressed
- to accompany a child in hospital.

If relatives or friends need to visit you, it is vital that they wash their hands for at least 20 seconds on arrival and often after that.

If hospital admission is likely 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? (Amended 8th June)

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 on the basis of 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? (Amended 8<sup>th</sup> June)

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.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are a new continuous cough, a fever/high temperature (37.8°C or greater), and/or a loss of sense of smell or taste. (Amended 8<sup>th</sup> June)

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 difficulty breathing, which might require admission to 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 face masks 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.

## What if I have been advised to 'shield'? (Amended 8th June)

**Some groups of people are considered to be at extremely high risk of severe illness with Coronavirus (COVID-19). If you are in this group you will have received a letter from NHS Scotland or will have been contacted by your doctor. If you are in this group you should currently be following shielding measures:**

If you are in this group we're looking at making some changes to our shielding advice. The link above will be updated to reflect these changes but we have also listed them here. When we first asked you to shield at home, we advised against all outdoor exercise. We're now advising that, from 18 June, you will be able to go outdoors for exercise, as long as coronavirus (COVID-19) infection rates in Scotland are low enough. We'll announce whether rates are low enough in the Scottish Government's daily coronavirus briefing on 18 June, by our SMS Shielding Service and on Scottish Government websites.





Once confirmed, on 17 June, our advice will be that there is no limit on the amount of times you can go out to exercise, or how long you can stay out for. If you decide to go out for exercise, you:

- should go for a walk, wheel, run or cycle
- can go out on your own or with someone you live with
- should maintain strict physical distancing, also known as social distancing, at all times, even if you live with the person you're out with
- should not meet with anyone you do not live with
- should choose times and areas that are quiet, if you can
- should stay close to home so you do not have to use a toilet that is not your own
- should wash your hands for at least 20 seconds as soon as you get back home

## Why is the advice to people who are shielding changing? (Amended 8th June)

We're looking to change our advice because we now know that the risk of getting infected with coronavirus (COVID-19) outdoors is very low if:

- infection rates in Scotland are low enough
- you stay 2 metres away from other people

Going out for exercise can also have real benefits for your physical and mental health.

### Other ways shielding might change in the future:

All other shielding advice remain in place until 31 July.

We know that you may have mixed feelings about this advice. That's why we want to tell you as much as we can about how shielding might change in the future. We are learning about the virus all the time, and about what increases or reduces the risk to you and to others. Over the summer, we will:

- Provide you with updated clinical evidence about your conditions and what that means for your risk from Covid
- Help you understand the changing risk of infection and how to reduce the risk of catching the virus yourself
- Provide that information in a way that is accessible, understandable and helpful
- Give you access to support that can help you make informed choices about your life
- Support you to put your choices into practice

We will do this because shielding will 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.

We would like to reassure individuals who are shielding and receiving treatment that it is important to continue to receive treatments. If the treatment is received in hospitals, we are





working hard to ensure that you are kept safe in a hospital setting and minimise your individual risk of contracting the virus.

## What else should I do if I've been advised to shield? Is there something I need to do differently to reduce the risk of Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

The paragraphs above tell you how the advice for this group is changing and to what extent.

Alongside this, the rest of your household should support you to stay safe and closely follow guidance on physical distancing, reducing their contact inside and outside the home. This will help protect you by stopping you from coming into contact with the virus.

Things you should be doing and not doing to stay safe:

- **DO STRICTLY AVOID** contact with anyone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature (above 37.8 °C), a new and continuous cough and/or loss of sense of smell or taste. You might want to have a thermometer at home to check your temperature if you are worried that you may have a fever.
- **DON'T** leave your home except to exercise, following the guidelines above. When arranging food or medication deliveries, these should be left at the door to minimise contact.
- **DON'T** attend any gatherings. This includes gatherings of friends and families in private spaces e.g. family homes, weddings and religious services.
- **DON'T** go out for shopping or travel.
- **DO** keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media
- **DO** use telephone or online services to contact your GP (for non-coronavirus issues) or other essential services.
- **DO** regularly wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. Ask carers or support workers who visit your home to do the same.

The rest of your household need to support you to stay safe and must stringently follow guidance on physical distancing, reducing physical contact with other people outside the home.

In your home, you should:

- minimise the time you spend with others in shared spaces (kitchen, bathroom and sitting areas) and keep any shared spaces well ventilated.
- aim to keep 2 metres away from others and encourage them to sleep in a different bed where possible.
- use separate towels and, if possible, use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household, or clean the bathroom with cleaning products after every use.





- avoid using the kitchen when others are present, take your meals back to your room to eat where possible, and ensure all kitchenware is cleaned thoroughly using a dishwasher at the 60 degrees setting if possible, otherwise in very warm soapy water.

If the rest of your household are able to follow this guidance to help keep you safe, there is no need for them to wear any special medical clothing or equipment.

## Where can I call for support?

If you have concerns related to cancer or your treatment you should contact your cancer clinical team.

The NHS Inform Scotland website has up-to-date information and answers to frequently asked questions.

[www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus](http://www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus)

A national helpline has been set up to provide essential assistance to those who don't have a network of support but who are in the 'increased risk' group.

If you are over 70, disabled, require the support of mental health services, are pregnant or receive a flu jab for health reasons (eg. receiving certain cancer treatments) you can call the national assistance helpline on 0800 111 4000 Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm. This national helpline has been set up to provide essential assistance to those who cannot leave their home and who do not have family or existing community support or cannot get help online.

Further information is also available on the [Ready Scotland](#) webpage.

Cancer Research UK nurses call 0808 800 4040 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Macmillan Cancer Support call 0808 808 00 00 (every day, 9am – 5pm)

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

Lots of cancer charities are also offering support at this time – please see a list of their services on [Voluntary Health Scotland](#).

## What should I do to collect my routine medications?

You should ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services to arrange deliveries of food and medicines where possible if you are not able or advised not to leave your home.

If this isn't possible, then arrangements have been made for:





**those classed in the highest risk group** and therefore are shielding can register for support via a text service, details will have been sent to you in the letter from NHS Scotland advising you to shield yourself at home (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding-contacts/pages/highest-risk-classification/>)

or

**those classed at increased risk**, but not required to shield, can telephone the national assistance helpline 0800 111 4000 Monday to Friday during office hours. Further information is also available on the [Ready Scotland](#) webpage.

Please remember this helpline is dedicated to helping those who cannot leave their home and who cannot get help online.

If you receive support from health and social care organisations, such as care support through your local authority, this will continue as normal. Your health or social care provider will be asked to take additional precautions to make sure that you're protected

## How can I maintain a positive mental health?

We understand that the situation you may be facing at the moment due to COVID-19 and your health condition can increase anxiety. In order to ensure you are looking after your mental health there are a few tips you can follow:

- look for ideas for exercises to do at home, the NHS website is a good starting point
- spend time doing things you enjoy – reading, cooking and other indoor hobbies
- try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals and exercise regularly
- try to avoid smoking and alcohol
- try spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air and natural light
- seek support through one of the [Scottish Cancer Coalition charities](#)

Support in dealing with anxiety around impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19) can also be found online at:

- [Breathing Space](#)
- [SAMH](#)
- [Support in Mind Scotland](#)

Tips on how to cope if you are worried about Coronavirus (COVID-19) and in isolation can be found at:

<https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/28084/coronavirus-covid-19/psychosocial-support-and-wellbeing/tips-on-how-to-cope-if-you-are-worried-about-coronavirus-and-in-isolation>

[NHS Inform](#) has further resources to help your mental wellbeing.







## Are my carers, and/ or friends and family still allowed to visit me?

At the moment, people are permitted to use public outdoor spaces for recreational purposes, for example to sit in a public space and one household can meet up with another household outdoors, in small numbers, including in gardens, but with physical distancing required. People can travel short distances for outdoor leisure and exercise but are advised to stay within a short distance of your local community and travel by walk, wheel and cycle where possible.

If you have a carer or visitor who supports you with essential everyday tasks, they are still able to come to your home. We do advise that upon arrival, and often throughout their visit, they wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.

If you rely on a carer, it would be a good idea to discuss options in the case that they were to fall ill and unable to visit/ provide care for you. In addition, see the [Voluntary Health Scotland](#) website which lists a range of support offered from a number of cancer charities in Scotland.

If you need help with care but you're not sure who to contact please visit [Care Information Scotland](#) Online.

## How has the advice changed for me if I am not shielding? (Amended 8th June)

On the 28 May the advice for those who aren't shielding changed. This means the general non-shielded population and those at an increased risk can sit in parks and open areas, and can meet up with another household while outside.

It's important to remember however, that those over the age of 70 without an underlying health condition and under the age of 70 who receive the flu jab for medical reasons are still classed as being at an increased risk from severe illness from COVID-19 and should be particularly careful in following physical distancing measures along with hand washing and cough hygiene.

Full details be found here: <https://www.gov.scot/news/route-map-for-moving-out-of-lockdown/>

