

Briefing Note: People who are Shielding Due to Vulnerability to Covid-19 – Our Leeds Response

A multi-agency (Bronze) task group has been established to support people who are shielding due to their vulnerability to Covid-19ⁱ.

The NHS has identified a number of medical conditionsⁱⁱ that would most likely result in severe illness requiring admission to hospital as a result of Coronavirus. Because of this high risk of complications, it is proposed that people with these conditions take significant measures to shield themselves from contracting the virus. In order to be effective these people would have to undergo strict social isolation with no contact from the outside world beyond that absolutely necessary, for a period of at least 12 weeks.

This week (w.c. 23rd March), many people with these conditions have been notified through a letter or text from the NHS, or through direct contact from their hospital consultant or their local GP practice.

Nationally, it is estimated that there are 1.5 people who fall into this category of very high clinical risk, and in Leeds this number is estimated to be 14,000-15,000 people.

For many, with the help of family, friends or neighbours and those with existing support and care arrangements in place, this difficult period will be managed without the need for additional support.

For others without strong networks, or whose networks are significantly disrupted by the pandemic, they will be unable to shield themselves without systematic support around the priority areas of: food, medicines, financial support and social connection.

People without robust arrangements are being asked in the first instance to register for assistance here: gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable or by phoning a national automated telephone service in order to register for support. Requests for support will then be relayed back to local government from the national database.

Additionally, to address some of the limitations of the national online/telephone approach, in Leeds Primary Care colleagues will be making efforts to contact all of their affected patients, to ensure that they have understood the guidance and to check that they have support systems in place. We are also working with a range of organisations to ensure that people with additional needs have received and understood this important information on their health.

In Leeds, in order to ensure that we are supporting people who need to shield as a priority, we are taking a multi-agency approach to ensure that people will have access to the support they need through this period.

A dedicated helpline number - **0113 378 1877** – has already been established in Leeds to help coordinate matching people with the support they need. This will have the capacity to refer people into specialist support services that they may need: such as social care support, welfare advice or housing support or to relay any requests for practical assistance to the many thousands of volunteers who are willing to help: such as delivering shopping or taking items to the post box. Over 4000 volunteers have signed up to offer this support via Doing Good Leeds in the first week alone – and this support will be crucial to assist people in shielding. Read more here: <https://doinggoodleeds.org.uk/covid-19-care-volunteering.html>

For people who need to take additional care to shield, their needs and requests will be prioritised and expedited where it makes sense to do so.

A multi-agency task group will support the helpline to ensure that any problems with requests for assistance can be easily resolved between partners. Working as one team for the people of Leeds, this will include specialist workers from health services, social care, pharmacy and logistics, from both the voluntary and the public sector.

Organisations and services who are already working with people who now need to take additional steps to shield, are being asked to continue their vital work, but are being offered assistance in meeting any practical needs, outside of those usual support arrangements. We are also signposting people to the wealth of information that is available online to help them in their particular circumstances, this includes mental health information through Mindwell: <https://www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk/> and information for people who are carers: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/coronavirus-covid-19>.

In the initial stages, the priority is to make sure that people who are shielding have adequate access to food and their medication. This is being delivered with the significant contribution and experience of the networks of foodbanks in Leeds, the support of food supplies negotiated between Government and the major supermarkets; help in logistics from the army; community pharmacy teams and staff and volunteers from across the city.

After this initial set up is underway, we will be able to listen more to the 14,000 people who are shielding to better understand their needs and what support they want to see in place over the coming months.

We recognise also, that for many people, the shock and stress associated with being termed “very high clinical risk” to Covid-19 may also take a number of weeks to manifest. We will be ensuring that people know that the offer of support remains open, even if it is not needed at this time.

ⁱ Anthony Cooke Chief Officer, Health Partnerships is chairing a multi-agency Bronze group to ensure that we meet the urgent needs of this priority group.

This group will coordinate with those places and agencies most likely to be in contact with people with very high clinical risk: council, primary care, Leeds community health care, local welfare support scheme, third sector health and care providers, RSLs and housing providers, the community hubs, Housing needs, Neighbourhood networks, Doing Good Leeds and the Children’s Early Help Hubs.

ⁱⁱ Diseases and conditions considered to be very high risk:

- Solid organ transplant recipients
- People with specific cancers
- People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radical radiotherapy for lung cancer
- People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- People having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors.
- People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs.
- People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD
- People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection
- Women who are pregnant with significant congenital heart disease