



CORONAVIRUS LETTERS



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE LETTERS?

On Monday 16th March, the UK government advised those who are or may be at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures.

This group has been identified to the public as those who are:

- aged 70 or older
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below
- chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma, COPD, emphysema or bronchitis
- chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
- diabetes
- problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or spleen removed
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- being seriously overweight (a BMI of 40 or above)
- those who are pregnant

This group of people will *not* be proactively contacted. They have been asked to take steps to reduce their social interactions in order to reduce the transmission of coronavirus.

In addition to this, an expert team have identified individuals within the above list who have clinical conditions which are likely to put people at the highest risk of severe illness from COVID-19. A letter has then been sent to all of these individuals from the NHS centrally.

This information has then been sent to all GP Practices who have received this list of patients. **GPs have not determined who should receive this letter.**

WHAT DO THE LETTERS SAY?

- The letters inform the patient that they have been identified as being at the highest risk from COVID-19 and advises them to **shield themselves by staying in their homes**.
- The patients are advised to access support from family, friends and neighbours to do their shopping and help with collecting prescriptions where possible. The letter includes information for patients who do not have this social support about how they can access this support from volunteers ran by the local council.
- If you work in one of the key roles outlined by the government, this letter is valid as a sick note for your employer that you cannot work for 12 weeks. (visit www.gov.uk to see the full list.)
- The patient is informed that **prescriptions will continue to cover the same length of time as usual**. The letter advises the patient to make arrangements for the collections/deliveries of their prescriptions.
- The letter also includes a reminder of what to do if, at any point, you think you have developed symptoms of coronavirus, such as a new, continuous cough and/or high temperature (above 37.8 °C), seek clinical advice using the NHS 111 online coronavirus service (<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>). If you do not have access to the internet, call NHS 111. Do this as soon as you get symptoms.

I RECEIVED A LETTER AND I DON'T THINK I SHOULD HAVE...

The government have acknowledged that many patients who fulfil the criteria may after discussion prefer not to be placed under such strict isolation for 12 weeks.

If you are expected to work – Check the government website for the list of key workers . Discuss your options with your employer, work from home if you can, this is government guidance for all people across the UK now. If you feel it is absolutely necessary to leave your house for work, and you are concerned about health risks because you have received a letter, then contact your GP practice, and cases will be dealt with on an individual basis.

If you're not expected to work – Follow government guidance that all people should remain at home, and only go outside for food, health reasons. Work from home if you can. If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times. Wash your hands as soon as you get home. Do not meet others, even friends or family.

I DIDN'T RECEIVE A LETTER AND I THINK I SHOULD HAVE...

The government have acknowledged that additional patients who are particularly high risk may not have been identified by the lists they generated, as this was not based on individual cases, but on clinical criteria.

If you are expected to work – Check the government website for the list of key workers. Talk to your employer. All employers are dealing with this differently, but should be aware of government guidance. If you absolutely cannot come to an arrangement with your employer, then you should contact your GP Practice, and we can deal with cases on an individual basis.

If you are not expected to work – Follow government guidance to shield yourself. In order for shielding to be effective, you should enforce strict social isolation with no contact from the outside world beyond that absolutely necessary, for a period of at least 12 weeks.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

GP Practices are awaiting further guidance in order to begin our own searches and begin the process of generating our own lists of patients who should have received letters so we can process these for you.

We ask you not to ring the GP Practices about this. Unless absolutely necessary. We understand that this will mainly affect those patients who are required to work as a key worker. All UK residents are now encouraged to stay at home unless absolutely necessary.

It is important to note that strict isolation and shielding is a move which will significantly impact on your quality of life, increase social isolation, and can in turn cause physical and mental health risks.

Stay at home to stay safe, but remember to look after your mental wellbeing at this difficult time.

The message for all UK citizens is:

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home
- Do not meet others, even friends or family.
- You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms