



9 May 2022

**IMPORTANT: PERSONAL**

Your Community Health Index (CHI) number: <<CHI>>

**The Highest Risk List will end on 31 May 2022**

Dear [forename] [surname],

I'm writing to let you know that on 31 May 2022, the Highest Risk List will end. This is after a careful review of the scientific evidence that's emerged over the last two years. It's also because the vaccination programme has significantly reduced the risk for the majority of people on the list, and new medicines are now available to treat Covid-19. I'm very pleased we're now in a position where I can confidently say the Highest Risk List is no longer needed, which is a positive step forward after a very difficult two years.

I know how difficult shielding was, and I do not plan to advise you to shield again. We're in a very different position now than we were back in March 2020 and we have better ways of managing the virus now. This means the Highest Risk List (which we used to refer to as the Shielding List) is no longer needed for us to be able to reach you with guidance and advice.

Please be assured that this does not change whether you're eligible for priority vaccinations, boosters or new treatments such as antivirals.

If we ever need to contact people at higher risk from Covid-19 again, we'll still be able to do this very quickly. We have a process in place for being able to find people's details based on their current health status.

**Why we're ending the Highest Risk List**

For some time now, my advice for you has been to follow the same guidance as everyone else in Scotland unless your GP or specialist clinician has advised otherwise. For most people on the Highest Risk List, the risk from Covid-19 is now no greater than from other viruses and infectious diseases before the pandemic. Many of you have also had changes to your condition or completed treatment since you were first added to the list.

The successful vaccination programme means people on the Highest Risk List and in the wider population are now far less likely to become seriously ill from Covid-19. The vaccine is suitable for almost everyone, except a very small number of people. If in doubt, speak with your GP or

specialist clinician. We also now have effective new treatments which can help prevent serious illness for people with certain health conditions.

## **Read the evidence behind this decision**

Throughout the pandemic, the Scottish Government's decisions have been based on advice from an expert group which includes our Deputy National Clinical Director, clinical experts across many different medical fields, social workers, and other specialists. This is in addition to advice from clinical experts across the UK.

We've published a summary of the key scientific evidence behind the decisions we've taken relevant to people on the Highest Risk List, including the decision to end the list. This includes strong evidence that a full course of vaccines and boosters offers a high level of protection to the vast majority of people on the Highest Risk List. You can read this Evidence Review at [www.gov.scot/highest-risk-evidence](http://www.gov.scot/highest-risk-evidence)

## **Your GP or specialist clinician is the best person to advise you**

Your GP or specialist clinician is the best person to advise you about your own condition and treatments. Please speak to them if you have any questions about managing your Covid-19 risk.

## **People who remain at higher risk**

The NHS can still identify people who remain at higher risk from Covid-19 due to their health conditions or treatments. These are mainly people who are severely immunosuppressed.

People in this group aged 12 years or over may have access to things like:

- a spring booster dose
- new antiviral and antibody treatments if they fall ill with Covid-19

If you are likely to be eligible for either of these, the NHS should already have sent you a letter to let you know.

## **Ending the Highest Risk List will not affect your eligibility for these.**

You can find the latest information on who is eligible for vaccines and treatments at [www.nhsinform.scot/covid](http://www.nhsinform.scot/covid)

## **Getting back to doing things you did before**

We know that shielding, isolation, loneliness and the worry of thinking of yourself as being at high risk from Covid-19 had a negative impact on quality of life and mental health.

Research by Public Health Scotland shows that over a third of people on the Highest Risk List are still trying to avoid contact with other households. I understand why, and also understand that everyone will make changes at their own pace. However, the evidence is strong that for most fully vaccinated people on the list there's no need to avoid contact now.

I have let GPs and other people who support you such as your physiotherapists, specialist nurses, and clinical teams know that the evidence is now strong enough to end the list. I have also let them know that some of you may need more help and support to adapt to this. Speak to the health

professional you feel most comfortable with and they can tell you more about the practical and emotional support available. There is also more information attached to this letter about who might be able to help.

## **Protection measures for everyone in Scotland**

We've now lifted all legal restrictions around Covid-19, but we're still asking everyone in Scotland to keep doing some of the things we've all got used to, to protect themselves and others. These include opening windows when socialising indoors, wearing a face covering in indoor public places and on public transport, and regular hand washing.

We also recently provided funding to support better ventilation in buildings, including schools and small businesses. We're reviewing building regulations to explore how new buildings can be designed to reduce infections. We're also now trialling a new Covid-19 safety signage scheme so that you can see what measures buildings have in place, including types of ventilation.

As before the pandemic, people who are immunosuppressed or immunocompromised can get advice from your GP or specialist clinician on how best to protect themselves. This might include reminding family and friends not to visit or come into close contact with you if they're not well.

## **Covid-19 testing**

Most people in Scotland no longer need to take a Covid-19 test and should follow the guidance on staying at home if they're unwell at [www.nhsinform.scot/covid19](http://www.nhsinform.scot/covid19)

However, some people can still order tests if they have no symptoms and:

- they have a condition prioritised for access to new Covid-19 treatments (find the list of conditions at [www.nhsinform.scot/covid19treatments](http://www.nhsinform.scot/covid19treatments))
- they're visiting a hospital or a care home
- they're an unpaid carer

You can order tests by calling 119, or at [www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests](http://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests)

It's important to report all test results on the NHS Inform website at [www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19-report-your-test-result](http://www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19-report-your-test-result)

We'll be able to scale up testing and other advice and regulations again if we need to, for example if there are any new variants or significant outbreaks that concern us.

## **If you have symptoms**

Anyone who has symptoms of Covid-19 or other respiratory infections such as cold or flu should stay at home and avoid contact with other people. You should also stay at home if you have a high temperature, or do not feel well enough to go to work or carry out day-to-day activities.

You can find guidance on what to do if you feel unwell at [www.nhsinform.scot/covid19](http://www.nhsinform.scot/covid19)

## Support and advice

You can read about wellbeing support and advice that is still available at the end of this letter. This includes the free British Red Cross Connecting with You service, which provides ongoing loneliness and isolation support to people who need it.

The Scottish Government recently set out a longer-term approach to living with the virus called the Strategic Framework. We want as many people as possible, including you, to benefit from this and regain a good quality of life. You can read more at [www.gov.scot/news/living-safely-with-covid](http://www.gov.scot/news/living-safely-with-covid)

Finally, I want to once again acknowledge how hard this pandemic has been, especially for people on the Highest Risk List. I also want to stress that, although giving blanket advice through the Highest Risk List is no longer appropriate, you will still be looked after in relation to Covid-19. As with other illnesses, your GP and specialist clinical teams are the best people to give you the personalised support you need. This move away from generalised advice aims to allow you to adapt to changing circumstances depending on your own circumstances and at your own pace, and I consider it very encouraging that we're now able to do this.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gregor Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**PROFESSOR SIR GREGOR SMITH**  
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

## More information



### The Distance Aware scheme

You and others you know can help support people who wear the Distance Aware symbol, whether or not you choose to wear it yourself. Look out for people wearing the symbol and give them extra space and care.

You can get a Distance Aware badge or lanyard free from your local library. Free badges are also available at some Asda stores. You can also order a badge online for a small charge. For more information visit [www.gov.scot/distanceaware](http://www.gov.scot/distanceaware)

## Support with mental health and wellbeing

If you're struggling, remember you can always talk to your GP, someone else in your GP practice, or someone in your clinical team - for example, your physiotherapist or specialist nurse, if you have one.

You can also use these free services for adults:

- **NHS 24:** call 111 if you need urgent support for your mental or emotional health. Open 24 hours a day
- **Breathing Space:** call 0800 83 85 87 for a free, confidential, phone service for anyone in Scotland over 16. If you're experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety, Breathing Space provides a safe and supportive space, listening, offering advice and providing information. Open Monday to Thursday: 6pm - 2am and Friday to Monday: 6pm - 6am
- **Samaritans:** call 116 123 for confidential emotional support if you're in distress or despair. Open 24 hours a day
- **British Red Cross Helpline:** call 0808 196 3651 if you're feeling lonely, worried, or are having difficulty accessing food or medication. Support is available in more than 200 languages. Open every day from 10am - 6pm
- **NHS Inform:** find useful information about mental health at [www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health](http://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health)
- **Clear Your Head:** find information to help you cope and advice on how you can support other people who you think might be struggling at [www.clearyourhead.scot](http://www.clearyourhead.scot)

For children and young people:

- **Aye Feel from Young Scot:** find information for younger people about looking after your mental health and wellbeing at [www.young.scot/campaigns/national/aye-feel](http://www.young.scot/campaigns/national/aye-feel) or speak to a member or staff who you can trust at your school, college or university
- **Parent Club:** find information for parents and carers of younger children at [www.parentclub.scot](http://www.parentclub.scot)

## Free loneliness and isolation support

Connecting with You is a free service run by the British Red Cross. It's available to all people aged 18 or over in Scotland who are experiencing issues associated with loneliness. This service can offer ongoing support to help you to reconnect with people and activities from before the pandemic.

It aims to help you to build confidence in day to day things like going to the shops, to a café, or just getting out and about. Connecting with You can provide one-to-one support by phone, online, or in person.

We have provided extra funding so this service can continue to support people who have been on the Highest Risk List.

## **How to use the service**

To arrange a phone conversation about what kind of support would be most helpful to you, contact the British Red Cross:

- by phone on 0300 30 36 077 (Monday - Friday, 10am - 4pm. Calls are free)
- or by email at [connecting-withyou@redcross.org.uk](mailto:connecting-withyou@redcross.org.uk)

## **Shopping and the end of supermarket priority slots**

We let you know last summer that we were pausing the offer of supermarket priority slots. For some time, the advice from the Chief Medical Officer has been that you can go into shops. Supermarkets have increased the range of ways to shop, like click and collect, ordering by phone, and gift cards for others to do your shopping. Supermarkets have also increased the availability of online delivery slots, meaning that it's now much easier to book a slot.

We paused the priority slots offer so that it could be quickly restarted if we needed to. As we do not plan to advise you to shield again, we will now stop this offer permanently. Supermarkets will be able to keep you as priority customers if they wish, but they cannot now hold your data as someone who has been on the Highest Risk List. There's more information about the range of ways to shop, including online delivery, at [www.gov.scot/publications/covid-highest-risk/pages/shopping](http://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-highest-risk/pages/shopping)

## **Advice if you're working**

We continue to encourage employers and employees to work together to consider hybrid working where possible. This means a mix of going into the workplace and working from home. We're also encouraging employers to consider the individual needs of people who have been on the Highest Risk List. This might include people who would prefer to work from home, as well as people who would prefer to return to the workplace.

Employers still have a duty to make the workplace safe for everyone and to carry out workplace risk assessments as part of this. We continue to strongly recommend that employers undertake Covid-19 risk assessments and continue with Covid-19 protection measures.

There's more information about work at [www.gov.scot/publications/covid-highest-risk/pages/advice-on-working](http://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-highest-risk/pages/advice-on-working). This includes advice about keeping yourself safer at work, including organisations that can provide more advice if you do not feel safe at work. There's also advice about help getting back to work or finding new work.

## **Support from your local council**

The National Assistance Helpline number has now closed. But if you need additional support your local council may be able to provide advice on where to get this. Find out how to contact your council at [www.mygov.scot/find-your-local-council](http://www.mygov.scot/find-your-local-council)

## **Translations and alternative formats**

You can find translations and alternative formats for past letters to the Highest Risk List at [www.gov.scot/highest-risk-letters](http://www.gov.scot/highest-risk-letters)

We'll also add translations and alternative formats of this letter there once they're ready.

## **Data protection statement**

You have been identified from either your GP practice, local Health Board or securely stored national data so we could write to you. This information has only been shared in a limited way within the NHS in Scotland and did not include your medical record. We may have previously shared your contact details only with your council so that they could support you.

Personal data that might be held on you for Highest Risk List purposes will be managed in line with the data retention policy of any organisation that holds it. This means that some bodies like Health Boards may keep some information for research or reporting purposes.