

An open letter to our population, from Dr Rachael Stow, on behalf of Weymouth and Portland Primary Care Network, regarding current GP protocols and the agreed shielding policy for patients at high risk of complications in our Community.

29/03/2020

Current situation in Weymouth and Portland

Health services in Weymouth and Portland are working together to keep our patients safe whilst continuing to provide essential services during the Coronavirus Pandemic: GP and Management leads from each GP Practice, Community and Pharmacy teams meet daily to ensure we are looking after the population and responding to the pandemic as it progresses. Please be patient with our reception, admin staff and local pharmacy colleagues who are working under intense pressure and in reduced numbers to provide this essential service. Your understanding and patience is appreciated.

To comply with social distancing instructions, the doors to most practices and hospitals are now closed. Appointments will be undertaken by phone, video consultation or by e-consult. If asked to attend, you may be directed to a different practice for your care. These measures are needed in order to separate patients who may have COVID-19 symptoms from patients not displaying any symptoms. This will reduce the risk of infection to you, your family and our staff.

Practices remain committed to providing all urgent and essential care. If you or your family have any symptoms that they would normally be worried about; examples might include breast lumps, bleeding or a deterioration in a long-term condition, contact your practice to arrange appropriate care or assessment.

We are ready, but we need your help.

111 online remains the best place to get advice for anyone who has a new continuous cough or fever <https://111.nhs.uk/service/covid-19> They will direct you to your GP practice if it is deemed necessary. Do not attend, you will be telephoned in the first instance.

Please consider using the new e-consult communication system. This is a form of email communication and does not require a login or sign up. You can use this service first for **any** query you have, this will free up telephone lines for those in our community who do not have internet access and those with an urgent medical need. It can be accessed via your Practice's website and clicking on the appropriate link. This is ordinarily a Blue Square seen when you minimise the latest COVID-19 information. Your GP will respond to this normally within twenty-four (sometimes up to forty-eight hours) by email or telephone.

Social distancing; Stay at home to stop coronavirus spreading. Remember we all have a part to play. Weymouth and Portland has many elderly patients and patients

with chronic disease. By acting responsibly, you can help protect our vulnerable and save lives. Further information <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>.

You should only leave the house for 1 of 4 reasons:

- shopping for basic necessities, for example food and medicine, which must be as infrequent as possible
- one form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk, or cycle – alone or with members of your household
- any medical need, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person
- travelling to and from work, but only where this absolutely cannot be done from home.

Important - These 4 reasons are exceptions – even when doing these, you should be minimising time spent outside of your home and ensuring you are at least 2 metres apart from anyone outside of your household.

Self-isolating, if you or a household member has symptoms.- Please follow the information provided in this link. [Staying at home if you or someone you live with has symptoms of coronavirus](#)

Stay at Home and Shield yourself if you are at high risk of getting seriously ill from Coronavirus.

All “High risk” patients have been asked by the government to “Shield” themselves, even within their home, for **12 weeks**. We will continue to provide care for these patients in the safest way possible and ensure they are shielded appropriately.

The Government has in addition written to GP practices asking them to help by identifying further groups of Patients that may have been missed from national datasets or who belong to at-risk groups where information is best held by local GPs. As a result, a further 16,000 patients in the Weymouth and Portland area will be contacted in the coming days to inform them of their increased risk of COVID-19 complications.

If you think you are on the following list, you can help by adopting or continuing to shield whilst awaiting your letter. If you are currently working and need a letter to inform your employer of your “Shielded status” or if you need support to start or continue shielding, **please use the e-Consult method of communication.**

Who is being asked to Shield?

Patients in the high risk, as well as those in the very high risk are now being asked to shield.

Patients in the Highest Risk Categories;

- Solid organ transplant recipients
- Patients with cancer undergoing chemotherapy or targeted immunotherapy

- People with bone marrow cancer, lymphoma, leukaemia, myeloma who are on active treatment
- Patient living with HIV
- Patients at risk of pneumococcal immunity suppression.
- Patients with severe respiratory conditions, cystic fibrosis, severe asthma, severe COPD
- People with genetic disorders that increase the risk of infection
- People on significant immunosuppression therapies. In particular patients on Azathioprine, mycophenolate, cyclosporin, sirolimus, tacrolimus.

Patients in High Risk categories

If you are in one of these categories, you will receive a letter in the next few days. Please only contact the practice for urgent assistance related to this such as the need for your employer to have a letter, or if you have no one who is able to help you in shielding.

- Patients with multiple long-term conditions.
- Patients with Asthma on high dose combination inhalers, or needing an add on tiotropium inhaler, or who have been hospitalised in the last year, or ever in ITU as a result of asthma. please see the link to the asthma.org website which details the inhaler you are taking. <https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/coronavirus-covid-19/#Shielding>
- Patients on other Immunosuppressant medication from listed above (methotrexate, leflunomide or oral prednisolone at dose of at least 20mg or more for more than 4 weeks for example) Please see the British society of Rheumatology guidance which classifies patients risk more accurately on the following link <https://www.versusarthritis.org/rheumatology-patients-and-covid-19-learn-more-about-the-risk-levels/>
- Patients who have had a splenectomy.
- Patients hospitalised with a pneumonia in the last year.
- Patients with diabetes and an HbA1c of > 75, recent diabetic ketoacidosis or are poorly adherent to medication.
- Patients with significant heart failure.
- Patients with dementia or cognitive impairment.

How can you get assistance with foods and medicines if you are shielding?

Ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services. If this is not possible, then the public sector, business, charities and the general public are gearing up to help those advised to stay at home. Please discuss your daily needs during this period of staying at home with carers, family, friends, neighbours or local community groups to see how they can support you. Please visit gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable to register for the support that you need. This includes help with food, shopping deliveries and additional care you might need.

Further information on shielding available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, for staying at home, for protecting the NHS and for saving lives. **You have an equal role to play alongside NHS Staff than in this pandemic.**

**STAY AT
HOME** 

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 **save
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