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Lewis Macdonald MSP

Convener

Health and Sport Committee

Dear Lewis

May 2020

### **Shielding of additional groups – kidney dialysis and splenectomy patients**

Responding to the coronavirus pandemic is the biggest challenge of our lifetimes and we must do all we can to slow it down and save lives.

As you will be aware, at the outset of the pandemic, the four Chief Medical Officers published a list of six groups where people would be considered to be at extremely high risk of severe illness should they contract COVID-19.

We've been writing to those who meet the criteria since restrictions were introduced. GPs and hospital clinicians are continuing to add people to the shielding list if they feel it is in their best interest and these people are then sent the letter with guidance as to how to shield and support available for them.

Since the publication of the main shielding list in March, we have received representations from clinicians recommending severe single organ disease groups be added to the classification of the 'highest risk' of severe illness from COVID-19.

The UK Chief Medical Officers have all agreed to seek consistency across the shielding list to support patients across the UK. Having differing advice in different countries would cause confusion for patients, clinicians and support groups.

Therefore, in order to ensure a consistent approach is being taken across the four nations in relation to shielding, a Review Panel has now been established.

The main remit of the Review Panel is to review the evidence on potential clinical risk factors for severe illness from COVID-19; and advise the senior clinicians group on whether to add or remove specific conditions to the extremely clinically vulnerable group.

We recognise that the restrictions we are asking people to follow are extremely tough and can significantly impact on quality of life and increase social isolation so we are ensuring people are only advised to shield when it is absolutely necessary.

### Kidney dialysis patients

At its first meeting on 22 April, the Review Panel recommended that kidney dialysis patients should be included in the shielding list. This recommendation was endorsed by senior clinicians across the four nations.

Although we now have agreement across the four nations to add dialysis patients to the shielding list, we understand that, in Scotland, many of these patients have already been included as a result of individual clinical judgment.

### Splenectomy patients

Since becoming aware that NHS England have been shielding splenectomy patients, the Interim Chief Medical Officer for Scotland and Interim Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Scotland engaged urgently with the UK Government, as the UK Chief Medical Officers have all agreed to seek consistency across the shielding list to support patients across the UK.

Following a meeting of the Review Panel on 29 April, and subsequent discussions with the other nations, the Interim Chief Medical Officer for Scotland and Interim Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Scotland agreed to include splenectomy patients to the 'highest risk' groups that require shielding.

We will, as a matter of urgency, issue letters to those affected and update guidance for GPs and clinicians.

And, we will of course, ensure that the Committee is provided with updates in relation to shielding as we continue to respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

**JEANE FREEMAN**