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By Email.

June 2020

I wrote to you on 4 May to update the Committee about the shielding of kidney dialysis and splenectomy patients. The initial 12 week period people who have been advised to shield for ends on 18 June, so I want to give you an update on the next steps for people who are shielding and the support that we are making available to them.

As the First Minister has said, people who are shielding are central to our thinking as we move forward - through and out of the crisis. Shielding is an enormous ask of people and their families, and we know it is increasingly hard as we start to ease restrictions for those at a lower risk. We also know that those who are shielding want clarity about when they can start to lead a less restricted life, but also want to have the confidence that we are achieving that in a way that is safe and is guided by the scientific evidence.

We are doing everything we can to get that advice right, and to look at how we can support people to make decisions that reflect their own risks and circumstances, as well as to the changes to the prevalence of the virus in our communities.

We know that this is a significant challenge, and we will be working closely with shielding people, third sector organisations, local authorities, and primary and secondary care providers to ensure we take the necessary steps to achieve this.

The Chief Medical Officer has written today to everyone who has been advised to shield, with further advice. The letter from the Chief Medical Officer informs people that while at this time we cannot give them an exact date for when shielding will end, over the course of the summer we will be working on ways to help them make informed decisions based on their individual circumstances, needs, and the risk of catching the virus in their local community.

People are being asked to continue to shield until at least the end of July. This position will be reviewed during July and any further changes will depend on the progress we have made in managing the spread of the virus across Scotland.

The letter advises people that although shielding will continue, from 18 June they can go outside for exercise, making sure to stay 2 metres away from other people, and, if possible, choosing times and areas that are quiet. There is no limit to how often or for how long a person shielding may go out to exercise. This updated advice does not apply to those who live in a residential care or nursing home – our current advice there will remain to stay at home and not go outdoors for exercise.

This change is subject to infection rates in Scotland remaining at a sufficiently low level, and we will announce whether they are low enough in the Scottish Government's daily coronavirus briefing on 18 June, through our SMS Shielding Service and on Scottish Government websites

This change is possible because we now know that the risk of catching the virus when outdoors, keeping two metres away from others and not spending time with other people, is very low. This is why we are now comfortable advising those shielding that they can go outdoors for exercise.

The letter also provides evidence to an employer that the person cannot work outside the home. They will not need to get a separate fit note from their GP.

Finally, the letter confirms that the support available for people who are shielding will continue, until at least the end of July, and I have provided more information about what that support is below.

It is vital that any changes we make to shielding advice reflects, not only the clinical advice, but also the voices of those who are shielding. We have already been talking directly with people who are shielding, but the letter will also ask people to fill in a survey that will form part of an evaluation to help inform the next steps on shielding.

### Support For People Who Are Shielding

As you may know, there are in the region of 180,000 people who have been advised to shield and not leave their home. A package of measures has been put in place to support them.

#### SMS service

We have set up an SMS messaging service, and local phonedlines have been established in every local authority, to respond to the needs of the shielded group. People are advised to sign-up to the service in the letters they are sent, and encouraged to do so even if they don't need help now.

#### Free Grocery Boxes

We have worked with national suppliers of food and other provisions to enable people in this group to order grocery packages, through the SMS system, to be delivered directly to their door, **free of charge**.

People who do not have a mobile phone can also access these grocery boxes by registering through their local authority phone line.

#### Priority Supermarket Delivery Slots

People who are registered for the SMS service are sent a text asking if they would like their details passed to the supermarkets, so that they can access priority supermarket deliveries.

Anyone who doesn't have a mobile phone can access these priority slots by registering through their local authority phone line.

### Prescriptions

We are continuing to work with the Community Pharmacy Network and Local Resilience Partnerships to ensure individuals who are shielding, and who do not have arrangements in place to have prescription medicines delivered, can continue to access their prescription medicines, through a volunteer-led distribution service.

I hope that the Committee finds this letter helpful.

**JEANE FREEMAN**