Department of Health & Social Care

From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

020 7210 4850

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The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chair, Health and Social Care Select Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

21 May 2020

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for your letter dated 7th May 2020 regarding those who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable and shielding. Public safety throughout this period is the Government's top priority – this includes keeping safe society's most at risk from the effects from catching covid-19.

2.2 million people have been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable and placed on the Shielded Patient List. This list has been drawn up based on a range of conditions that clinical experts have identified as presenting significantly higher risk of serious illness of death from covid-19, based on the best available evidence at the time. These were signed off by the UK Senior Clinicians Group (including Chief Medical Officers across the four nations of the UK and clinical leadership at NHSE, NHSD, and PHE). Individuals were originally identified centrally, based on their medical records. This initial list was then supplemented by GP's and clinicians reviewing their own patient lists to ensure all relevant individuals had been identified, and crucially to allow them to exercise their own clinical judgement about the risk to their patients. The Shielded Patient List has therefore grown over time. People are added and removed from the shielding list regularly based on individual clinical judgment, as clinicians are best placed to advise on the needs of their individual patients during this time.

This combination of stages has meant it has not been possible to send all letters at the same time. GP's and Hospital specialists can add or remove patients they feel should be included on the Shielded Patient List on a case by case basis.

Currently that list stands at 2.2m people. If anyone is concerned that they should have been contacted but have not been, they should get in touch with their GP or consultant.

The shielding advice has been put in place until the end of June, when it will be reviewed in line with scientific evidence. We advise anyone who is shielding to observe these measures until the end of June irrespective of when they received a letter. This brings everyone shielding in line with the same guidance on duration. Communications have been carried out by both letter and text. Texts are sent centrally by the NHS and are used to notify patients of the advice to shield, signpost them to resources, encourage them to register on the website or phone. People are able to opt out of text messages and

instructions on how to do this are included in each message. Everyone who is shielding is encouraged to register on the website or phone service, even if they do not need support at this time.

For those who do not have support networks to draw on, we launched the shielding programme in March to help these individuals get basic supplies and put them in contact with local services and volunteers. Last week, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government announced the delivery of the millionth food box. Furthermore, we have shared details of shielding individuals who need support accessing supplies with supermarkets, so that they can be prioritised for delivery slots.

We are also working with our amazing NHS Volunteer Responders to support shielding individuals via the GoodSam app. Shielding individuals can request support directly using the app, for example to access medicines and shopping. Councils can also refer individuals through the app, including arranging regular 'check-in and chat' calls from volunteers to individuals to prevent loneliness. Additionally, we know many councils and local partners are providing a wide range of help including virtual social opportunities.

I hope this addresses your concerns. The shielding programme works to protect the most clinically vulnerable during this challenging time and everyone has an important part to play in stopping the spread of coronavirus and to shield those most at risk.

Yours ever,



MATT HANCOCK

Health and Social Care Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
Tel: 020 7219 6182 Fax 020 7219 5171 Email: hsccom@parliament.uk
Website: www.parliament.uk/hsccom Twitter: @CommonsHealth

From Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP

7 May 2020

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Email to: mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk

Dear Matt,

I am writing to you in relation to those designated as being in the most 'at risk' group during the coronavirus epidemic, in response to correspondence received by the Health and Social Care Committee.

It has been brought to our attention that people in this group have received communication from the NHS, advising them to isolate for twelve weeks, at a variety of times over the past month, including some in the last week. There appear to remain gaps in the receipt of these communications, with some people who would fall into one of these categories of extra risk still not receiving any contact. In addition, the communications appear to have come from a variety of different sources, including GPs, Public Health England, and Regional Health Boards in Scotland. A further confusion appears to have been caused by the lack of consistency in the nature of these communications, with some coming in emails, letters, texts or other means.

I would therefore be very grateful if you would outline for me the process underlying the sending out of these communications, including how the individuals concerned were selected and the oversight of the scheme. In addition, given the apparent substantial variation in the date of receipt, why this is the case and whether this is likely to have caused avoidable harm to those who received the letters in a delayed fashion.

I would also be grateful if you could comment on the logic behind the standard twelve-week isolation period, particularly in the light of this period starting at different times for different people, depending on the date of receipt of the letters.

Finally, I would be grateful to know what comprehensive support is being offered for people during this twelve-week isolation, including mental health support and access to food and vital medications.

As I am sure you agree, it is vital that we support the most vulnerable during this period.

Yours,



Rt hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee