



1st December 2020

Dear Members,

We hope you are well. We are writing today to inform you of the new rules being introduced by the relevant Governments and what this may mean for you and your loved ones. There will also be guidance on what to expect during the festive period at the end of this document.

We understand how difficult this is for everyone, but your health is most important. There have not been many cases of people with thalassaemia contracting covid-19 reported in the UK and this is credit to you and your haematology teams for taking the necessary precautions to keep everyone safe. Please continue to do as you have been doing to ensure you remain as safe and healthy as possible.

England

In England, the government has re-introduced the tier system which begins on December 2nd. As you may be aware, at each tier there will be a set of rules that everyone living in your area must follow.

Despite the end of lockdown in England, it is imperative that you remember the virus is still very much around and you need to do everything you can within the rules to ensure you keep yourself and your loved ones safe. Please do not ignore or disregard the guidelines and rules set out by the government about social distancing and meeting indoors if it is not allowed in your tier.

It is important to note that you should continue to keep the number of social interactions that you have low and try to reduce the amount of time you spend in settings where you are unable to maintain social distancing.

The full guidance can be found online at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> and you can find out what Tier your local area is in here: <https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-local-restrictions>.

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

The government have issued the following advice for people who have been classed as “clinically extremely vulnerable”. Please note there are not many people with thalassaemia who fall into this category so if you are concerned about this, please contact your local thalassaemia team for more information.

Please find the relevant government’s advice below.

Advice for clinically extremely vulnerable children and young people

As our knowledge of COVID-19 has grown, we now know that very few children are at highest risk of severe illness due to the virus. Doctors have therefore been reviewing all children and young people who were initially identified as clinically extremely vulnerable to confirm whether they are still thought to be at highest risk.

If you have already discussed this with your child's doctors and they have confirmed your child is still considered highest risk, your child should follow the advice as set out in this letter.

Summary of advice for the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) for each local Tier

You must follow the rules and restrictions that relate to the Tier your local area is in – they apply to everyone.

The below sections summarise the additional things you are advised to do to keep yourself safe at each local Tier.

Tier 1: MEDIUM

Socialising

- Strictly observe social distancing
- Meet outside if possible
- Keep the number of different people you meet low
- Still go outside for exercise

Travel

- Limit unnecessary journeys on public transport

Work and school

- Work from home where possible
- Attend work if you cannot work from home
- You should continue to attend school or college

Going to the shops and the pharmacy

- Consider shopping or visiting the pharmacy at quieter times of the day
- Strictly observe good hand hygiene and maintain social distancing as much as possible
- NHS Volunteer Responders can support you if you need help

Tier 2: HIGH

Socialising

- Reduce the number of different people you meet
- Still go outside for exercise

Travel

- Avoid travel where possible except for going to work, school, or for essential shopping
- If you need to travel, walking, cycling, or travelling in a private car are safer than public transport

Work and school

- Work from home where possible
- Attend work if you cannot work from home
- You should continue to attend school or college

Going to the shops and the pharmacy

- Reduce the number of shopping trips you make, including to pharmacies
- Consider using online delivery slots for food shopping, or ask friends and family to help deliver shopping or collect medicines for you
- NHS Volunteer Responders can support you if you need help

Tier 3: VERY HIGH

Socialising

- Stay at home as much as possible
- Still go outside for exercise

Travel

- Avoid travel where possible except for going to work, school, or for essential shopping
- Stay at home as much as possible

Work and school

- Work from home where possible
- If you cannot work from home, speak to your employer about taking on an alternative role or change your working patterns temporarily. You can attend work if this is not possible
- You should continue to attend school or college

Going to the shops and the pharmacy

- Significantly reduce your shopping trips, including to pharmacies
- Consider using online delivery slots for food shopping, or ask friends and family to help deliver shopping or collect medicines for you
- NHS Volunteer Responders or your local authority can support you if you need help

If you are in a Tier Three: Very High alert area you can also register via <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-shielding-support> to request access to priority supermarket deliveries, if you do not have someone you can rely on to go shopping for you. If you already have priority deliveries with a supermarket, that will continue – you do not need to do anything further.

If you are in a Tier Three: Very High alert area and need other forms of help, you should contact your local council directly. Find out how your local council can help you at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-local-help>.

Wales

Due to the ‘stark’ rise in cases, First Minister Mark Drakeford issued new rules which will come into effect on Friday 4th December at 6pm. It is extremely important for people with thalassaemia continue to keep the number of social interactions that you have low and try to reduce the amount of time you spend in settings where you are unable to maintain social distancing.

Please try to limit contact with anyone outside your household or support bubble (and hospital teams) as much as possible.

You can find more information here: <https://gov.wales/shielding-extremely-vulnerable-people>

Scotland

Scotland has introduced a COVID protection level for each area. There are 5 different levels starting from 0 to 4. The lowest level is 0 and the highest level is 4.

You should not meet anyone who is not in your household indoors in your home or in their home. You can meet another household indoors in a public place. The maximum number of people who can meet indoors in a public (not a home) place is 6 which can be from up to 2 separate households.

Those with thalassaemia who have been identified by their haematology team as being at a higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus should strictly follow the physical distancing guidance. It is important to note that you should continue to keep the number of social interactions that you have low and try to reduce the amount of time you spend in settings where you are unable to maintain social distancing. This might include gatherings with large numbers of people, especially indoors, because it significantly increases your risk.

For more guidance on the COVID protection levels in your area, please follow this link: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/pages/overview/>

Northern Ireland

Following an increase in coronavirus (COVID-19) cases, additional restrictions have been introduced for people living in Northern Ireland. These new restrictions have been put in place to help reduce the spread of coronavirus and to help manage the pressures on the health and social care system.

There should be no household gatherings, other than those involving support bubbles.

You should work from home if at all possible. Only leave for essential purposes such as education, healthcare needs, to care for others, or outdoor exercise.

Those with thalassaemia who have been identified by their haematology team as being at a higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus should strictly follow the physical distancing guidance. It is important to note that you should continue to keep the number of social interactions that you have low and try to reduce the amount of time you spend in settings where you are unable to maintain social distancing. This might include gatherings with large numbers of people, especially indoors, because it significantly increases your risk.

For more information visit: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-what-restrictions-mean-you>.

Vitamin D supplements

During the autumn and winter months the government has advised people who are “clinically extremely vulnerable” to take a supplement of vitamin D every day to support general health and in particular for bone and muscle health.

Many of us have been indoors more than usual this year and so might not have been making enough vitamin D from sunlight. You can find general advice on vitamin D here: <https://www.nhs.uk/vitamin-d>

We would like to advise those living with thalassaemia to contact their haematology teams to find out whether this would be suitable for them (providing this hasn't already been prescribed).

Access to additional support

Please visit <https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support> to get more information on what government support is available to everyone during the pandemic.

Your local council may run local support networks or hubs, and there might be local charities in your area that can provide you with any extra help you need. Your local council's website will have more information about this.

NHS Volunteer Responders are also available to help with things like collecting shopping, medication or other essential supplies and with transport to medical appointments. They can also provide a regular, friendly phone call which can be

provided by different volunteers each time or by someone who was previously advised to shield and will stay in contact for several weeks. More information is available at <https://www.nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk> or you can call 0808 196 3646 between 8am and 8pm.

It is also really important to look after your mental health. The Every Mind Matters website offers advice and practical steps that you can take to support your wellbeing and manage your mental health during this pandemic. You can visit them at <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters>.

Advice for the festive period

From the 23rd- 27th December, the UK Government will be changing some restrictions on social contact. This allows you to form a 'Christmas bubble' in which you can spend time indoors and outdoors with people from up to three households, including your own. You can choose to be part of a Christmas bubble if you are clinically extremely vulnerable, but it does involve greater risks for you as you will be increasing the number of people you have contact with.

It is important that you and the other people in your Christmas bubble consider these risks carefully before agreeing to form a bubble. Forming a Christmas bubble is a personal choice and should be balanced against the increased risk of infection.

If you do decide to form a Christmas bubble, it is advised that you maintain social distance from those you don't normally live with at all times, avoiding physical contact. Everyone should wash their hands more often and touch points, such as door handles and surfaces, should be kept clean. It is also important to allow fresh air into the space where you spend time with those you don't normally live with. You may want to think about who you sit next to, including during meals, and also consider wearing a face covering indoors where social distancing may be difficult.

If you don't feel comfortable spending time with other people indoors, think of other ways that you can safely spend time together, for example on walks outdoors or supported by technology, and how you can make that time feel different and special. Going outdoors carefully for exercise is also encouraged. It is important that you do not feel pressured to celebrate Christmas in an environment that makes you anxious.

There may be a lot of expectation and pressure around celebrating Christmas together, but you should feel comfortable to do what is right for you over this period. To do that, it is important that the other people in your Christmas bubble understand your needs and increased risk. They can help by being extra vigilant in the days before you get together, reducing any unnecessary contact with people, especially as some people with the virus have no symptoms.

Once the Christmas bubble period ends on 27 December, you should follow the guidance that was in place before Christmas, in line with the restrictions for your local area.

Find more information on this here :

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family/making-a-christmas-bubble-with-friends-and-family>