

SIA Briefing Sheet

Title: Government announces reduction in shielding

Date: 26 June 2020

From Monday 6 July those previously advised to stay at home and shield can start to leave their homes albeit with certain restrictions:

Outdoors

You may, if you wish, meet in a group of up to 6 people outdoors, including people from different households, while maintaining strict social distancing of 2 metres. Also be mindful when outdoor of factors like wind direction and strength which will impact on how far the virus could travel in the air.

Indoors

You no longer need to observe social distancing with other members of your household

If you wish, you may also form a 'support bubble' with one other household. All those in a support bubble will be able to spend time together inside each other's homes, including overnight, without needing to socially distance.

The guidance is set to be further relaxed from Saturday 1st August when clinically extremely vulnerable people will no longer be advised to shield, although support will remain available from NHS volunteers and local councils. People will retain their priority for supermarket delivery slots, and still be able to access help with shopping, medication, phone calls and transport to medical appointments

From this date, the government is advising you to adopt strict social distancing rather than full shielding measures. Strict social distancing means you may wish to go out to more places and see more people, but you should take particular care to minimise contact with others outside your household or 'support bubble'.

You can read the full document by following the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-to-ease-guidance-for-over-2-million-shielding>

What does this mean for the SCI Community?

Making sense of the Government advice can be confusing. Especially as research and understanding of the virus is constantly developing and therefore the official advice is evolving and changing. This can be further compounded by the additional difficulties a person with SCI needs to consider. SIA have attempted to make things

a little clearer. as we are in a rapidly changing environment. The Government advice should be followed but with some additional considerations suggested by SIA:

- When you leave your home, you should follow the guidelines on staying safe outside your home. Most importantly, this includes the key advice that you should stay two metres apart from anyone outside of your household, support bubble or carer (where applicable). This may be reduced to 1 metre in the future.
- The most effective way of reducing your risk of catching the virus remains frequent hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds when indoors. If outdoors and hand wash facilities are not easily accessible or available, then use a hand sanitiser. If you have limited hand function and struggle to wash your hands or use hand sanitiser when outdoors consider using hand wipes ensuring you cleanse all surfaces of your hands thoroughly, although not officially recognised as a safe hand cleansing method it would be better than nothing at all. Hand cleansing should occur after you blow your nose, sneeze or cough before you eat, handle food or after you have touched any surfaces frequently touched by others and always immediately when you return home. This will apply to your carers and/or members of your family if they assist with any of these activities. It is essential that you ensure you or your carer avoids touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Cover coughs or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue safely in a bin and cleanse hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home and on your wheelchair including arm rests, wheel rims, tyres, hand controls whenever you return home from being outdoors.
- Face coverings can help us protect each other and reduce the spread of the disease if you are in an enclosed space where social distancing is difficult and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet. See the full advice here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home

From 15 June face coverings must be worn on public transport, as set out in law. There are exceptions to those required to wear a face mask which includes those who are unable to don or remove one independently. This can apply to many SCI people with tetraplegia. Individuals will need to make personal decisions on this, and weigh the risks up against the benefits. SIA will be producing an exemption card that you can print and carry with you.

The infection situation will be monitored by the Government, and a further episode of shielding may be required in the future. We would recommend that you attempt to establish an emergency pack of supplies of any sundry items to avoid a shortage. For example, some members have struggled obtaining gloves and suppositories for

bowel care from their pharmacies. It may be worth purchasing some boxes from a general retailer to have in your emergency supply should the shortage occur again. SIA Healthcare attempted to resolve the issue for our members and so you may want to consider signing up.

www.spinal.co.uk/sia-healthcare

Members have also contacted SIA concerned about ill health and reluctance to attend hospital for fear of catching the virus. The NHS is now learning to operate with Covid -19 and resume 'normal' services. If you have health concerns do not hesitate to contact your health care provider to deal with these. This can prevent more serious complications occurring in the future.

Many of SIA members are concerned about returning to work as the guidelines are eased, we recommend they speak with their employer. Discuss their employer's specific policies in relation to COVID-19. They should discuss their situation, agree a plan for returning to work and adjustments that may be needed before they return.

Others may be concerned about isolation as their family return to work and school. For some people it may help to chat with SIA's telephone Counsellor. For more information about this service and how we can help [visit our website](#).

We also [have an article](#) from Jane Duff, Consultant Clinical Psychologist at National Spinal Injuries Centre (NSIC) which contains information to help you during this difficult time.

If you have any further concerns, please contact SIA support Line on 0800 980 0501

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