

Coronavirus – Patient information

The NHS has contacted those patients who are at extremely high risk already but this initial contact was only for those with a small number of specific conditions. The initial guidance asked GP surgeries to contact other patients who they determined should also be placed into this category. Unfortunately the guidance for this activity has not yet been received and this has left a large number of patients concerned about whether they should be shielding, social distancing, self isolating and unclear about their level of risk. Along with risks relating to long term conditions, there are also risks for patients who are pregnant.

We are not able to say with certainty which category patients should be placed into, we can only confirm if they have any long term conditions and in particular we are unable to comment specifically on the nature or type of work they could safely undertake.

Clearly those with underlying conditions are at higher risk of complications from Covid-19 and employers should be following the guidance in the link below. Where possible, enabling staff to work from home or if in the workplace ensuring that social distancing can be practiced.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

We are aware of the levels of anxiety our patients with long term conditions or pregnancy have and we encourage our patients to talk with their employers to try to agree a safe working plan during these difficult times. We are also cognisant of the extreme pressure employers and businesses are under. As employers ourselves, we have sought to minimise or stop contact with the public for staff members with underlying conditions which put them at higher risk, redeploying them to back office roles where possible.

There is good information also to be found on the various disease specific websites:-

British Lung Foundation <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus>

Asthma UK <https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/coronavirus-covid-19/>

British Society for Rheumatology <https://www.rheumatology.org.uk/news-policy/details/covid19-coronavirus-update-members>

Pregnancy (Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists) <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>

One of the issues GP surgeries have faced in further identification of patients at risk is the complexity of searching our clinical systems and the need for very specific parameters to have been developed in order to define the searches. It is unlikely for example that we will be able to define 'severe COPD' from a data perspective, similarly defining the data for moderate or severe asthma will be equally difficult without a single agreed approach at national level. We are therefore concerned that the clarity being sought by patients and their employers may be some way off, or indeed may prove unachievable. We are sorry that expectations of the ability of GP surgeries to identify patients were raised and would like to assure you that we are working closely with other

practices on this issue and that the problematic nature of this work has been raised at a national level.

We would therefore ask that employers and employees discuss a way forward which both parties can agree on utilising the guidance available (which is being updated all the time).

Further guidance can be found here:- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>