

## **Somerset's Coronavirus Response**

The four District Councils, the County Council and Somerset NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) are working together to ensure that all adults and children in Somerset are kept safe and healthy throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, however long that lasts

### [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

#### **What is Shielding?**

Shielding is a measure to protect people identified by the NHS who are *medically extremely vulnerable* to Coronavirus by minimising all interaction between these people and others until the end of June.

#### **Who is being advised to Shield?**

The Government is strongly advising these people to follow Shielding measures to keep themselves safe. These measures including staying at home at all times and avoiding any face-to-face contact until at least the end of June. People falling into this clinically vulnerable group have been identified by the NHS and include:

- Solid organ transplant recipients
- People with specific cancers
- People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
- People with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
- People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- People having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD
- People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell)
- People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection

- Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired

### **Who is eligible for shielding support from Government?**

- To receive support, people must be in receipt of a letter from the NHS or their medical practitioner, advising them to follow Government Shielding guidance due to their medical condition.
- Many of these people will have a support network of people around them, who can help with shopping or collection of prescriptions, to be left at the front door.
- But there will be some who have no friends, family, neighbours or other nearby networks to do these things for them; Government's Shielding programme has been created to provide assistance and support to this specific group.
- If people do not register for Government support, Government cannot provide them with the assistance they require. If you are aware of someone who has received the NHS letter, and requires Government support but has not registered, it is imperative that you encourage them to access the GOV.UK website or call the number on the letter – without registration, they cannot get assistance.

### **What does the Governments Shielding programme provide?**

The Government's offer to shielding individuals who request support covers the following three areas of assistance:

- **Essential groceries** – a free, standardised weekly parcel of food and household essentials, and priority delivery slots with supermarkets;
- **Medicines** – arrangements to have medicines delivered to people's homes by local community pharmacies or their dispensing doctor;
- **Social contact and basic needs** – for example, emotional or social support such as people to talk to on the phone or via a computer.

### **What else is being done to provide support to other people at risk?**

There are other people who do not qualify for Shielding support, but who are affected by Coronavirus for a range of reasons. In Somerset we have worked together as Local Authorities with Health to identify people who may be at risk and taken the following steps to ensure people are able to access advice, information and support as required:

- Set up a Helpline and promoted this in local press and across parishes and communities
- Sent a letter to over 70,000 people who we have identified as potentially at risk with the helpline contact details

- Made welfare checks and outbound calls to over 2,000 people who we have identified as most at risk
- Provided support to homeless people – 75% provided with temporary accommodation (all offered)
- We also continue to provide regular contact and support to all 15,000 people known to Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Housing, SDAS, SIDAS, Mental Health
- We also provide additional support to the just over 15,000 people in Somerset who are shielding – they have all received the letter giving details of the Coronavirus Helpline and in partnership with community /social prescribing organisations, we are making contact with those who have said they need additional support to ensure that local solutions are in place. This also includes proving top ups to the Government Food Parcels and providing specific dietary requirements.

### **How can the public access information and advice?**

**1. The Somerset Coronavirus Support Helpline - 0300 790 6275** – Joins up services across all the councils making it easier for the public to get advice. It is open **7 days a week from 8am – 6pm** and runs in addition to existing District and County Council Contact Centres advice lines. The public can contact the Coronavirus helpline for:

- Emotional support if you're feeling worried or anxious
- Financial support
- Personal care
- Support getting essential food supplies and prescriptions
- Housing advice
- Transport advice for urgent medical appointments
- Waste collection and disposal

They can also access this information online, contact by email and subscribe to get the latest updates at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

### **2. For medical advice**

As a consequence of social distancing measures and some of the messages associated with it, there has been a significant reduction in people attending their GP practice or hospital appointment for important medical checks. Over the last few weeks the NHS has made many adjustments to ensure it can continue to see people safely. Community partners are asked to help convey the following messages as appropriate to a person's situation:

***If you need medical help, the NHS in Somerset is still here for you.***

- If you need medical help from your GP practice, contact them either online, by an app or by phone to be assessed.

- If you need urgent medical help, use the NHS 111 online service. If you cannot get help online, call 111.
- If it's a serious or life-threatening emergency, call 999
- If you are told to go to hospital it is important that you go to hospital.
- You should continue to attend your appointments, unless you have been told not to attend.

**3.** Distribution Hubs have been set up to **supply emergency food** to people not be able to access food through family, friends, neighbours or existing networks. People needing support should contact the Coronavirus Helpline.

**4. Mindline** provides emotional support and is now available **24 hours a day 7 days a week** and connects through to Young Somerset for under 18s (and further specialist support if needed).

**5. CCS Village, Community & Carers Agents** provide confidential, practical community-based solutions for people, wherever they are in Somerset. People and organisations can refer to this support clicking on the link below and completing the essential information within the word form.

[https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=6rDsIanzbkKIaMTvMrikz7A6USUAjrPi\\_ALDxfXEIRURDg0U1IMVjhMSkFaNVBPVEo1RkhCSUM1Vi4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=6rDsIanzbkKIaMTvMrikz7A6USUAjrPi_ALDxfXEIRURDg0U1IMVjhMSkFaNVBPVEo1RkhCSUM1Vi4u)

**6. Health Connections Mendip** provide support to Mendip residents. Their website gives some advice on Coronavirus and how to contact the team for support <https://healthconnections mendip.org/category/covid-19-community-support/>

**7.** We are also working with a number of other community and voluntary organisations to ensure people have the support they need. The public should contact the Coronavirus Helpline to be directed to the right support for them.

## **8. E vouchers and free school meals**

If families would like to see if they are eligible for free school meals please apply through this web site:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/education-and-families/free-school-meals/#Apply>

Free School meals are organised by Schools who have a choice of three ways of providing food:

- Continue providing food from their kitchen
- Provide weekly food boxes
- Use a national scheme of E vouchers

Please note that the national scheme website has been overwhelmed by the number of schools applying, and therefore there have been some delays.

Families should contact their child's school if they have queries relating to the free school meal / food boxes they have received.

### **How can people volunteer?**

To make it easier for people to volunteer across Somerset we have worked with Spark Somerset. They have set up <https://www.corona-helpers.co.uk/> and developed resources and support for local groups: [www.sparksomerset.org.uk/covid-19](http://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/covid-19). 1,200 volunteers have now signed up to corona-helpers and 95 organisations are listed. Spark Somerset also lists additional information about Coronavirus related support available from other voluntary sector organisations in Somerset via: <https://sparksomerset.org.uk/self-isolating>.

Note: NHS Responders is a national volunteer initiative which was launched on 26 March to help support vulnerable individuals who are self-isolating. Priority is given to those identified as most at risk from Coronavirus and asked to self-isolate at home for an extended period, and to those who health practitioners and local authorities consider to be vulnerable. The volunteer initiative is being delivered by NHS England and NHS Improvement in partnership with Royal Voluntary Service and enabled by the GoodSam Responders app: <https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHS>.

Individuals who meet the national criteria can self-refer **0808 196 3646** (8am to 8pm)

The NHS Responders initiative is not intended to replace the work of local groups. For now we would advise partners to make full use of the local Corona Helpers scheme as we have oversight on these local volunteers and can coordinate the response locally. We are encouraging anyone who has signed up to NHS Responders to make themselves known to Spark Somerset who can be contacted via: 01460 202970 or email [SUPPORT@SPARKSOMERSET.ORG.UK](mailto:SUPPORT@SPARKSOMERSET.ORG.UK).

### **What financial support is available to Somerset Charities, organisations and community groups?**

- Somerset Community Foundation has set up the **Somerset Coronavirus Appeal** to raise funds for local charitable groups that are supporting the most vulnerable people affected by the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) <https://www.somersetcf.org.uk/appeal>. To-date over £500k has been raised and grants of up to £10,000 are available to help local charities and community organisations who are supporting people during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. To apply groups need to complete a short, simple application form available via: [www.somersetcf.org.uk/coronavirus](http://www.somersetcf.org.uk/coronavirus)

- Spark Somerset have launched a one-stop shop for all things funding, and it is completely free to access. Visit [www.sparksomerset.org.uk/somerset-funding-portal](http://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/somerset-funding-portal) to browse hundreds of funding opportunities by category. They have also set up Spark Somerset's [Facebook Group for Somerset Fundraisers](#)

**What other support is available to Somerset Charities, organisations and community groups?**

Spark Somerset have set up [online resources](#) and are delivering a free programme of [webinars](#) for Somerset voluntary and community groups.

**How do we escalate risks and issues we are experiencing?**

- For issues relating to volunteers, funding, general enquiries re your organisation please contact Spark Somerset
- For issues with supply of food or products needed to sustain your provision to the public please email [coronavirusbrokeragecell@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:coronavirusbrokeragecell@somerset.gov.uk)
- To escalate issues or contact the 5 councils and CCG with Coronavirus related queries please email [coronavirusbrokeragecell@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:coronavirusbrokeragecell@somerset.gov.uk)