

T: 0300 244 4000  
E: CabSecHSC@gov.scot

Gillian Martin, MSP  
Convenor, Health, Social Care & Sport Committee  
[hscs.committee@parliament.scot](mailto:hscs.committee@parliament.scot)

27 April 2022

Dear Convenor,

I am writing to let you know that we have decided to end the Highest Risk List from 31 May 2022 and a Parliamentary Question has been answered to this effect this morning.

The Highest Risk (previously known as the Shielding List) was set up in March 2020 based on what was known at the time about the virus, to identify groups of people reasonably believed to be at highest risk of poor outcomes if they caught COVID-19. The situation has changed significantly due to the vaccine programme and new treatments, as well as more extensive and accurate data which Public Health Scotland can now access to identify groups eligible for vaccine priority, new treatments where they may be eligible, and additional advice if needed in the event of an escalated threat level.

We have therefore considered carefully whether people need to continue to be on the Highest Risk List. A significant body of evidence has been reviewed by clinical advisers related to the impact of vaccination for the approximately 176,000 people who are on Scotland's Highest Risk List. Strong evidence that the risk of hospitalisation or death from Covid has significantly reduced for the majority of people on the Highest Risk List as a result of vaccination, alongside effective new treatments now being made available to people who will benefit most, has informed our decision to stand down the Highest Risk List from 31 May 2022. The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) will write to everyone on the Highest Risk List to advise them of this, along with a summary of the evidence that informed this decision and information about further, ongoing guidance and support, within the coming weeks.

The CMO also said in his letter that we will share the evidence that we have used to make those decisions and we are also publishing a summary of the clinical evidence today: *Evidence for Scottish Government Advice to People on Scotland's Highest Risk List*. <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781802017311>. We are aware that a core of immuno-suppressed people are unable to mount a full immune response due to their condition and/or treatment. We will publish separate advice for this group. We are working with Public Health Scotland and have put an identification process in place to be able to rapidly generate an accurate and current list of individuals for vaccine prioritisation and covid treatments, and to provide additional advice in the event of any escalated threat level to those who may need it.

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We are also aware from our own and Public Health Scotland research with people on the Highest Risk List of ongoing wider negative impacts, particularly in terms of mental health, and issues of isolation, for some people on the Highest Risk List. We know that some people will continue to be more cautious or anxious about what this change means for them, or need more time to reconnect with people, or to restart the things they were doing before the pandemic. To help support these people, we have funded the British Red Cross to extend their Connecting with You Service to support people to rebuild their confidence and lives. We are also engaging with partners across all sectors to find ways to support people who may need more help to adapt, and will continue to provide guidance on protecting ourselves and others, including promoting the Distance Aware Scheme.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Yousaf', written over a light blue horizontal line.

**HUMZA YOUSAF**

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