



From the Deputy National Welfare Advisor

5 April 2020

Dear Area/Branch Secretaries and Shipmates

CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – SURVIVING ISOLATION

RNA sends all shipmates best wishes in this Delay phase during our confinement to barracks, particularly our senior shipmates in the High Risk category needing social shielding. However we need to put a virtual “arm around the shoulder” of all our shipmates in this time of urgent need. The Research phase is proceeding in parallel with this to identify treatments and how the virus spreads but solutions will be some way off. Social distancing and self-isolation as necessary will continue for all of us with many shipmates self-isolating for an extended period due to risk and others due to suffering symptoms or exposure. This briefing provides information on protecting the body.

Do not forget the key advice to all is **Stay at Home** to protect yourself, others and the NHS so

- Only go outside for food, health reasons including exercise or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home
- Do not meet together with others, even friends or family. You can spread the virus even if you do not have symptoms

Am I a clinically extremely vulnerable (high risk) NHS patient needing social shielding? The NHS recently sent out texts and letters to patients on their shielded patient list for Coronavirus to give them the information and advice they need. You may have been contacted by your GP or hospital clinician. If you have had any contact in this way you are High Risk. If you have a condition as below and not been contacted you can register online or do it on behalf of someone else at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable> . You'll be asked for your NHS number (on any letter the NHS has sent you or on a prescription) but you can still register if you do not have it. More details at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/advice-for-people-at-high-risk/> . There is separate guidance for all four parts of the UK. The extremely vulnerable groups are:

1. Solid organ transplant recipients
2. People with specific cancers as at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/>
3. People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe COPD.
4. People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as SCID, homozygous sickle cell).
5. People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.
6. Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired

However remember the initial list of nearly one million patients was produced by combining routine NHS data from multiple sources. Their priority in this extremely complex process was to ensure that NHS got vital information to patients as quickly as possible so some may have been sent in error. It may also take time for any support offered through this new service to arrive so wherever possible you should continue to rely on shipmates, family and wider support to help you meet your needs.

Where can I get current information I can trust? This briefing supplements official guidelines with advice on protection and who can help shipmates survive our isolation. Follow on articles will



look at other issues such as bereavement and financial help during the crisis. The government websites (www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/ and <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) offer detailed guidance and FAQs on all aspects but delivery of the reality of caring is down to us where we live making a difference for our shipmates and others. Alternatively look at NHS 111 online (<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>) for advice and assessment if feeling unwell but only call if you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home or your condition gets worse or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days.

Have you joined or created an RNA Virtual Shipmates and Oppos group? I am aware and send BZs to the many shipmates in branch reporting formation of virtual shipmate, oppos or buddy groups to keep in contact by phone, text, letter or e-media. A great chance to make new friends and contacts! Additionally though physical support in terms of food shopping and collecting medicines is vital for self-isolating shipmates. Don't forget that self isolation sadly will not be new but a continuation of social isolation for many seniors. Let's use this situation to make a difference! Branch Secretaries should have contact details for all their shipmates that they can act on but all shipmates in Branch can help. The Secretary and Welfare Officer cannot reach everyone. Even if there's only have a group of three or four that will help.

Can anyone else help? There are many community responder groups with volunteers running mutual aid programmes developed by residents, voluntary organisations and churches in many localities. Details are on your local council websites who are acting as co-ordinators of the community responses. Do not think you have to cope alone, your branch shipmates or local community group should have contacted you. If not, reach out to them and ask for help.

How can I help my shipmates? Practically if you are at low risk and staying healthy then volunteer to help in as above. A friendly shipmate chat over the phone or at 2m is a boost to anyone in isolation. Contact your more senior shipmates (**but only if sure you are not infected**) and ask if you can help in their self-isolation. Keep a safe distance of 2 metres when the door is answered and find out what is needed. Keep your hands clean on returning items and wipe the bags. Be aware of what else is being offered by community groups locally and share that to shipmates. Even a copy of the newspaper dropped off is keeping shipmates in touch with what's going on. We can make this happen to everyone's benefit. Sadly many shipmates are already socially isolated and one "benefit" of Coronavirus could be to make us more aware and supportive of our shipmates so as to make the family motto "Once Navy Always Navy" a reality.

Will the NHS help me? The NHS is now moving to provide essential priority care and so elective or non-urgent support will be much reduced as capacity will be really stretched in the coming months whilst we all try to delay the disease to protect the NHS and save lives. Advice remains not to go to your GP, Pharmacy or Hospital if you have symptoms but to self isolate. You are allowed to leave home for medical appointments but hospitals and GP practices may postpone non-urgent health checks or routine appointments or arrange telephone consultations. You should consult your doctor if there is an essential medical need, only call 111 if you're unable to get help online and for life-threatening emergencies only call 999 for an ambulance.

Please distribute this widely, keep following government public health guidelines and look after your shipmates and oppos by phone, text, e-media or letter.

Best wishes and stay well,

Geoff Apperley