

## FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

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Dear *Florence + Gary,*

Thank you for your joint correspondence of 3 June 2020 regarding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD).

Firstly, I understand fully the impact of and the very significant challenges faced by all those people who have been shielding.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for Health and Social Care which prior to the pandemic was already facing huge strategic challenges in the form of an ageing population, increasing demand, long and growing waiting lists and workforce pressures.

Many hospital appointments provided by the health service have been adversely impacted by the need to tackle COVID-19. The regional neuromuscular service at the Belfast HSC Trust is however, providing appointments by way of video links for all patients and, if it is assessed that the child requires it or if the parent requests, a face-to-face appointment will be offered.

Physiotherapy assessments are being offered to service users where appropriate and the respiratory team are treating patients for lung function testing, if required. The cardiology service is providing diagnostics and face-to-face appointments, if required. The endocrinology and diabetic medical team are also offering telephone clinics with patients with DMD.

The challenge that our health and social care services now face, as we move into this phase of response to the pandemic, is how to maintain the capacity to provide care for patients with COVID-19, while simultaneously increasing other urgent clinical services, important routine diagnostics and planned surgery.

My department has published the Strategic Framework for Rebuilding HSC Services. The Framework sets out the approach to rebuilding HSC services in the context of COVID-19 and will underpin development of incremental service plans, detailing how capacity can be increased in the context of COVID-19.

The Department's latest guidance 'COVID-19: Advice for Informal (Unpaid) Carers and Young Carers during the COVID-19 Pandemic' which was published on 10 April 2020 and updated on 8 June is available here:

[www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/advice-for-carers-during%20-covid19.pdf](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/advice-for-carers-during%20-covid19.pdf)

Guidance for people who have received letters from their GP or hospital care team advising them to shield as they are considered to be at the highest risk from COVID-19 is available here:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/guidance-shielding-extremely-vulnerable-people>.

This guidance advises that from 31 July, it is anticipated that shielding for extremely vulnerable people will be paused.

Our guidance is produced locally in line with best practice elsewhere in the UK, and is reviewed and updated regularly as appropriate. Going forward, co-production of policy and co-development of services in partnership with service users, their representatives, and community and voluntary organisations remains central to the work of my Department.

I trust you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely



**Robin Swann MLA**  
**Minister of Health**