

**COVID-19 in North Somerset:  
stories of shielding or self-isolating**

**June 2020**



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## About Healthwatch North Somerset

Healthwatch North Somerset's statutory duty and remit, which is laid out in The Health and Social Care Act 2012, is to provide a voice for people who use health and adult social care services.

We give people an opportunity to have a say about their care, including those who are not usually heard. We ensure that their views are taken to the people who make decisions about services. We also share feedback with Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to ensure that your community's voice is heard at a national level too.

We are also here to provide information about services in the North Somerset area, and signpost people to find specialist help. We work closely with other local community groups and organisations to make sure that we support people to make informed choices and decisions about their care and make public all reports of our work with patients, families and carers.

## Our vision is simple

Health and care that works for you. People want health and social care support that works - helping them to stay well, get the best out of services and manage any conditions they face.

## Our purpose

To find out what matters to you and to help make sure your views shape the support you need.

## Our approach

People's views come first - especially those who find it hardest to be heard. We champion what matters to you and work with others to find solutions. We are independent and committed to making the biggest difference to you.

## How we find out what matters to you

People are at the heart of everything we do.

Our staff and volunteers identify what matters most to people by:

- Visiting services to see how they work
- Running surveys and focus groups
- Going out in the community and working with other organisations
- Networking with Patient Participation Groups who have their ear to the ground

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# COVID-19 in North Somerset:

## stories of shielding or self-isolating

### Introduction

This report summarises the feedback and stories we have heard from local people about their experience of shielding or self-isolating during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 (CV19) pandemic. Based on their feedback, the report makes some recommendations.

During lockdown, our local Healthwatch focused on supporting residents through this pandemic. We sent out posters (Annexe 1) to all local GP practices and supermarkets indicating our enhanced signposting and information capacity, and provided a 37 hour a week phone number for people to contact us. We regularly spoke to surgeries, community volunteer groups and Parish Councils to refer at-risk housebound residents. Healthwatch also became an NHS Responders referral organisation in April 2020.

During the months of April and May we received 120 phone calls and referred 105 residents to access the support they needed. All calls were from North Somerset's residents or their relatives who were shielding or self-isolating. Most of the callers were referred to COVID-19 community response groups, local Citizens Advice, and community and district transport organisations. The calls were mainly to request support for food shopping and collecting prescriptions from local pharmacies. At the beginning of the lockdown, several residents called because they were confused about who should be shielding, and whether shielding people had priority to book a slot for shopping at a supermarket. Some people also wanted to know how to suspend the free weekly parcel of food and household essentials provided by the government to shielding individuals.

In May, requests for patient transport to attend appointments at hospitals and GPs increased. This could be a result of the cancelled appointments at the beginning of the lockdown that started to be rescheduled. From mid-May, calls from residents who needed mental health and wellbeing support also increased.

In June, we contacted 70 of the shielding and self-isolating residents who had previously called us, and we asked them to take part in this survey. 45 residents agreed to tell us about their experiences of seeking information and government's guidance related to CV19, the effect of lockdown on their wellbeing, and their support need and satisfaction with the support they received.

## Background

While most people infected with COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness, evidence suggests that people over 70 years old and those with underlying health condition are more likely to have a negative experience, with risks increasing from people aged 50 and upwards<sup>1</sup>.

North Somerset has a significantly ageing population, with a 4.2% higher percentage of older people (60+ female, 65+ male) than the rest of England and Wales. Of North Somerset's total population, 21% of them are 65+, 9.9% are aged over 75, and 2.8% are over 85 years of age. Compared to England, the percentage of population over 75 is almost 30% higher and the percentage of over 85s is 40% higher as a percentage of total population<sup>2</sup>.

On 20 March 2020, the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, stated that older people (70 years and over) and those with medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and cancer should stay home and avoid all face-to-face contact for minimum of 12 weeks<sup>3</sup>. They were considered to be “vulnerable” to the Covid-19 virus. This group was divided by those considered to be at high risk (clinically extremely vulnerable) and those considered to be at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable). Those at high risk were sent a letter and told to shield themselves at home<sup>4</sup>. This category were provided with food, but the vague term ‘vulnerable’ continued to be used, and caused confusion as many older people although vulnerable were considered to be in the moderate risk category and therefore were not eligible for food or extra support provided.

According to North Somerset Council, 9,463 residents were identified as “vulnerable” (over 70 and/or with an underlying health condition), but only 369 (3.8%) were known to Adult Social Care and 1,957 (20.6%) received a government food box.

At the beginning of the lockdown, after we sent out our poster to all local GP practices and supermarkets indicating our enhanced signposting and information services, Healthwatch North Somerset was contacted by few GP surgeries. It was agreed that they would signpost their patients who felt in the category of “vulnerable” to us for the right support service according to their need. This way, their safety was also secured considering that many live by themselves and the news reporting an increase in scams and false offers of help.

## Executive Summary

This executive summary lists the key findings based on the residents' responses.

- 80% considered themselves to be at high risk from CV19, 23% of those received a letter or text advising them to shield
- 72% said they had an existing health condition
- 58% are aged 70 or over
- 58% live by themselves and 29% of all respondents do not receive any help from family or friends
- 22% do not have access to the Internet
- 13% did not find it easy to understand the information about how to keep themselves and others safe during the CV19
- 37% found it difficult to get clear information or advice about particular topics especially those relating to their health.
- 29% experienced changes to the delivery of their healthcare due to CV19 and from those 38% rated the communication received about the changes poor or very poor
- 77% contacted their local surgery during the lockdown and from those 91% rated their services Good or Excellent
- 63% said they felt isolated or lonely in lockdown. 54% felt this affected their wellbeing and impacted on their physical health.
- 90% said that they received the support they needed from the Community Aid groups and 92% were Happy or Very Happy with the support provided.

## Recommendations

These recommendations result from the experiences we heard about during CV19 and would improve the experience of many other older people spending long periods at home alone, especially those without internet access. We believe the following recommendations to be achievable, affordable and evidence based.

- Keep information clear and concise, with guidelines that are age and condition specific to keep residents safe from a virus.
- Clear and consistent information from health professionals about who should be shielding and who does not fall into this category.
- Increase the use of local radio stations & local papers to inform residents who do not use the internet and give them links to local community support.
- Empower residents by locating technical support for them to make use of video conferencing and health apps for information about health conditions and speak to friends and family.
- GP surgeries to provide clear guidelines to patients on the requisition and collection of repeat prescriptions and managing routine and regular tests.
- GP surgeries to link vulnerable people to social prescribers or primary care mental health workers
- Provide to those self-isolating/shielding, hard copies of visual resources with easy-to-follow daily exercises to help them stay active and improve their wellbeing.
- Increase the capacity of programs which tackle loneliness to support those most vulnerable.

## Method

The 70 residents we called back to take part in our survey were all self-isolating or shielding due to their health or age vulnerability to Covid-19, or because they were caring for someone considered “vulnerable”. In total, 45 residents agreed to take part in the survey, 15 said that they did not want to take part, 8 did not answer the phone or did not return the calls, and two numbers were not recognised.

This was a phone-based interview survey that permitted those residents who were shielding or self-isolating, and especially those who did not have access to Internet, to have their views heard, offering them also a safe way to do the interviews during the lockdown.

Two volunteers and a member of staff made the calls. First, they explained why they were calling. The interviewees were then asked if they were happy to answer the questions, and for their consented to Healthwatch recording and using their responses. There were 31 questions to answer and the majority answered all the questions. Apart from question 15, which 40 participants answered, all other questions were answered by between 43 and 45 participants.

## Limitations & Strengths

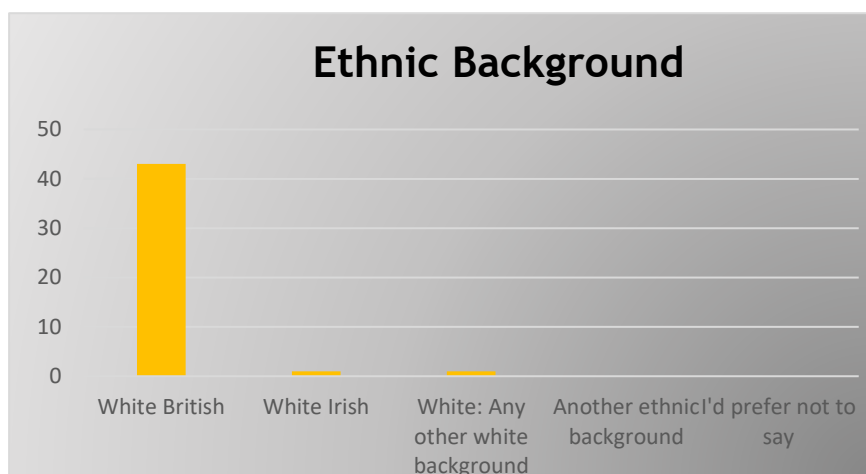
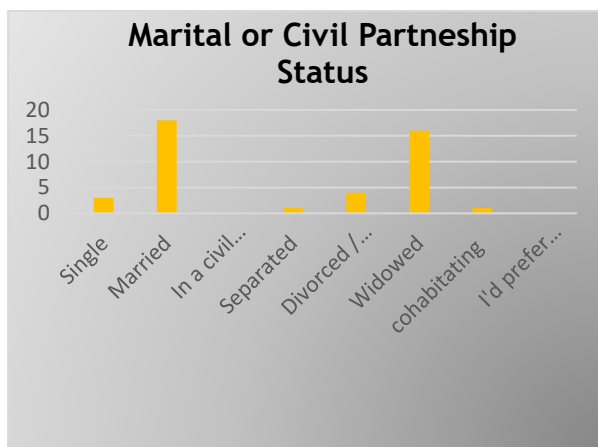
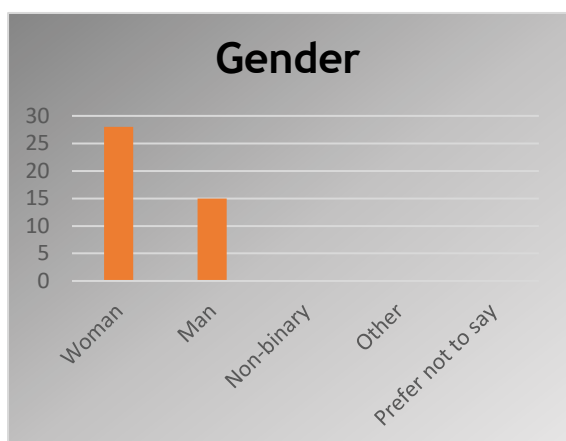
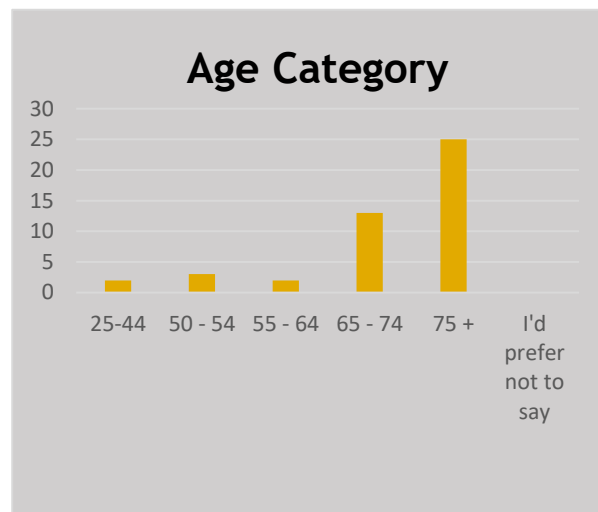
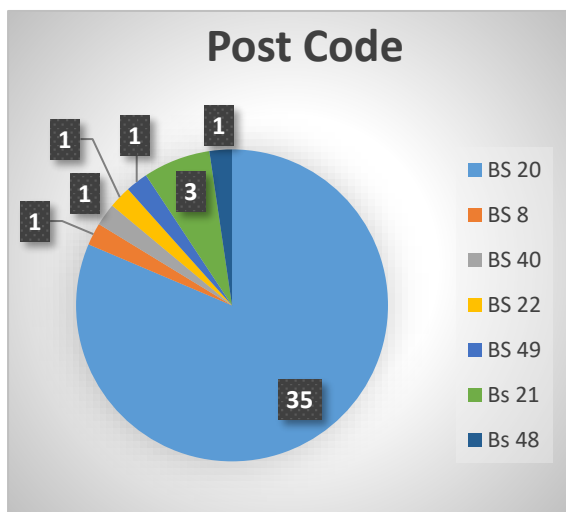
Phone-based interviewing has permitted Healthwatch to probe for clarity and uncover valuable feedback not always apparent through email or web-based surveys.

The survey is representative of the views, experiences and opinions of 45 North Somerset’s residents. Most respondents (85%) were residents from Portishead, Clevedon, Nailsea and surrounding areas. Many were given the Healthwatch number by their local surgery. It is not a representative study of the whole population in North Somerset that were shielding or self-isolating during lockdown.

There is poor representation from non-white ethnic backgrounds. Out of the 45 respondents, 43 were white British, one White Irish and one White Other. Representatives from ethnic minority groups could offer different or additional findings. However, the population of North Somerset is less ethnically diverse than England. 97% classify themselves as belonging to a white ethnic group<sup>1</sup>



# Demographics



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## Questions

### 1. Do you consider yourself to be at high risk from COVID-19/coronavirus?

Yes	36	80%
No	6	13%
Don't Know	3	7%

The majority of residents who took part in this survey said that they considered themselves to be at high risk from Covid-19. While six residents said that they did not consider themselves at high risk, three of them were caring for someone in this category. Three people said that they did not know because they were not sure if their health conditions were considered at a high risk.

Some residents were confused about what it meant to be “clinically vulnerable” or “clinically extremely vulnerable” and did not understand exactly who was and was not required to shield. See [Respondents' quotes](#):

### 2. If yes, can you please tell us why?

I have an existing health condition	26	72%
I'm aged 70 or over	24	67%
Another reason	2	5%

From the 36 residents who considered themselves to be at high risk from Covid-19, 72% (26) said they had an existing health condition and from those 26, 58% (15) are aged 70 or over with an existing health condition. The two residents who answered “another reason” were also aged 70 or over, one had pneumonia few years ago, and the other suffered from high blood pressure.

### 3. Did you receive a letter or text advising you to shield yourself?

Yes	14	31%
No	31	69%

Though 36 (80%) residents responded that they considered themselves at high risk from Covid-19, only 31% (14) of them received a government letter with shielding advice. There were some mixed messages, especially at the beginning of the lockdown, about the Government’s shielding policy and about the letters being sent to patients considered clinically at high risk. See [Respondents’ quotes](#):

#### 4. If yes, was it easy to understand information on it?

Yes	12	86%
No	2	14%

Though the majority of those who received a letter with shielding advice said that it was easy to understand the guidelines, although some respondents found it too long with a lot of information on it.

Two respondents said that the letter was difficult to understand and one was very frustrated that the letter took so long to be sent and with no clear advice given on it. [See Respondents’ quotes](#)

#### 5. Do you receive help from family or friends?

Yes	32	71%
No	13	29%

#### 6. Do you live by yourself?

Yes	26	58%
No	19	42%

While the majority of the respondents receive help from family and friends, nearly 30% of them don’t, and this can be an indicative of social isolation. More than half of the respondents (58%) live by themselves.

#### 7. Do you care for or support someone, who is considered to be at high risk from COVID-19/coronavirus?

Yes	13	29%
No	31	71%

## 8. If yes, please tell us why:

<b>They have an existing health condition</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>They're aged 70 or over</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>Another reason</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8%</b>

Among those 13 people who responded that they cared or supported someone considered to be at high risk, 7 also considered themselves at high risk.

## 9. Have they received a letter or text advising them to shield?

<b>Yes</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>77%</b>

Again, some of those who cared for someone at high risk from Covid-19 said that they were confused about the shielding letter or why they did not receive it.

## 10. Do you have access to the Internet?

<b>Yes</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22%</b>

More than 20% of the respondents did not have access to the Internet. According to Office National Statistics, in 2019 only 7% all households in Great Britain did not have access to the Internet. However, when it comes to the use of the internet, 83% in the 65 to 74 years age group and 47% in the 75 and over age group are internet users<sup>6</sup>.

## 11. Where have you found information or advice about the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic?

GPs	4	9%
TV News	37	82%
Radio	9	20%
Newspaper	7	15%
Local Council	0	0%
NHS website	2	4%
Social media (FB, Twitter)	2	4%
From family & friends	2	4%
Other	13	28%

Though 78% of the respondents said that they had access to the Internet, only 8% said that they found information and advice about the Covid-19 pandemic on the NHS website or on social media. TV news (82%) were said to be the main source of information and those who mentioned other (28%) said that they preferred to have information from family members, health professionals, neighbours or friends. Some mentioned that it was too depressing watching the TV news and that they tried to avoid it. [See Respondents' quotes](#)

## 12. Was it easy to find the information you needed about how to keep yourself and others safe during coronavirus pandemic?

Yes	37	84%
No	0	0%
Neither easy or difficult	7	16%

### 13. Was it easy to understand the information about how to keep yourself and others safe during the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic?

Yes	32	71%
No	1	2%
Neither easy or difficult	12	27%

While 71% of the respondents said that it was easy to find information about how to keep safe during the Covid-19 pandemic, nearly 30% said that it was not easy. Some found the government guidelines very confusing, without consistency. Some said that there was too much information, it was not clear, and sometimes overwhelming. [See Respondents' quotes](#)

### 14. Did you find it difficult to get clear information or advice about any particular topics?

Yes	16	37%
No	27	63%

More than 35% of the respondents said that they found it difficult to get clear information or advice about a particular topic. The most common issues were to get information and advice on accessing repeat prescriptions, how to manage regular blood tests, clear information about getting support for medication and shopping and clear advice about who should be shielding or not. One respondent said that they couldn't get any support from the physio after their partner was discharged from hospital during the lockdown. [See respondents' quotes](#)

### 15. Did you find any specific information or sources of information especially helpful?

Yes	11	27%
No	29	73%

Those (27%) who said that they found specific information, or source of information, especially helpful mentioned the local Coronavirus Community Aid Facebook group in Portishead and in Nailsea, as well as local free newspapers as they had news about local shops and deliveries. Two respondents said that they found the NHS and Gov websites helpful and two others mentioned Facebook groups for people who are the shielding. [See respondents' quotes](#)

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**16. Have you, or has the person you care for, experienced any changes to the delivery of your/their healthcare due to the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic? (such as community nurse or care)**

<b>Yes</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>I/they haven't needed any healthcare services</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>51%</b>

**17. If yes, how would you rate the communication received about the changes?**

<b>Very poor</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Poor</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Fair</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Good</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8%</b>

The majority of those who experienced changes to the delivery of their healthcare due to the COVID-19 pandemic rated the communication received about these changes good (38%), very good (8%) or excellent (8%). But nearly half (46%) rated fair (8%), poor (23%) or very poor (15%).

Those who experienced positive changes mentioned Sycamore Lodge Residential Home for keeping them in regular contact with their spouse who had to go into the nursing home for health reasons; a district nurse for keeping some visits and wearing PPE. One of the respondents who was diagnosed with cancer during the lockdown said that they were well looked after by St Michaels hospital, BRI, Cosham, South Bristol and Oncology.

Several of those who did not have a positive experience with the changes mentioned Southmead Hospital. One respondent said that they had to chase the hospital to get her blood tests results and to find out if they should go to the hospital for a new examination; another said that they had several outstanding appointments but didn't receive any communication about them and they were cancelled. Another respondent said that they had been referred to the recovery mental health team before the lockdown but did not receive any type of communication and they were still waiting. [See Respondents' quotes](#)

## 18. Does this relate to a specific service?

Yes	9
No	0
Prefer not to say	1

## 19. Did you contact your local surgery during the lockdown?

Yes	33	75%
No	11	25%

## 20. If yes, how was your experience?

Very poor	0	0%
Poor	1	3%
Fair	2	6%
Good	17	56%
Excellent	11	35%

The majority of the respondents said that their experience when they contacted their local surgery during the lockdown was good (56%) or excellent (35%). They praised the information given by some of the surgeries and how well organised some were when ordering their prescription or arranging safe appointments. One respondent, however, said that they had not been contacted by their surgery when they needed a blood test to be taken regularly. [See respondents' quotes](#)

## 21. Did you have any appointment with your GP during the lockdown?

Yes	18	42%
No	25	58%

## 22. Have you felt isolated and/or lonely?

Yes	27	63%
No	16	37%

The great majority (63%) of the respondents said that they felt isolated or lonely during the lockdown. For many people, being alone or with one companion for such a long period of isolation has led to increasing stress, anxiety and loneliness. Most of them said that they Covid-19 in North Somerset: stories of shielding and self-isolating / June 2020



missed their family members and their social activities. More than half of the respondents (58%) live by themselves and while some of them said that they were used to being alone in the house, it was harder not to be able to meet people socially. [See respondents' quotes:](#)

### 23. Has isolation affected your health and wellbeing (for example, with loss of access to community activities)

<b>Yes</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>46%</b>

More than half of the respondents (54%) said that isolation had affected their health and wellbeing. Several of them mentioned that their physical health was also affected as they had to stop their routine exercises and fitness classes. For some of them, the deterioration of their physical health compromised their wellbeing. For two of the respondents, it was very difficult to accept that they needed any support as they had never looked for help before. For many people, such a long period of isolation, alone or with one companion, has led to increasing stress, anxiety and loneliness. See [Respondents' quotes:](#)

### 24. Did you get the support you needed during the lockdown?

<b>Yes</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>90%</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10%</b>

The majority of the respondents (90%) said that they got the support they needed during lockdown. The main support they received was from the COVID-19 community response groups in North Somerset providing volunteers that sorted mainly their food shopping and prescription collection. However, four respondents said that they did not receive the support they needed. Two of them (5%) were shielding and it took several weeks for them to receive the food parcel provided by the government. The other two did not specify why they did not receive the support they needed.

### 25. How happy are you with the support you have received?

<b>Very Happy</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>Happy</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Neither happy nor unhappy</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Very Unhappy</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Don't know</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

Most of the respondents were happy with the support they received during the lockdown. Again, the COVID-19 community response groups were praised by the quick and efficient way they provided the support the residents requested. [See respondents' quotes](#)

## **26. If we have another lockdown, is there anything you would like to see relating to health and social care services?**

[See respondents' quotes](#)

## Respondents' quotes:

### 1. Do you consider yourself to be at high risk from COVID-19/coronavirus?

- *I'm not sure how to answer. I have an auto-immune issue so consider myself at risk but don't know if it's officially recognised. It's based on my reading about it.*
- *I have kidney problems, but I don't know if that means at risk.*
- *My husband was very ill last year, had 2 operations so for me, I thought we'd follow the same isolation as people who are vulnerable. [Back](#)*

### 3. Did you receive a letter or text advising you to shield yourself?

- *I don't know why I didn't [get a shielding letter] I've got an appointment in July, but I've never heard a word from the consultant or the health centre.*
- *I haven't got a letter, but I'm on steroids for polymyalgia rheumatica. Dr said my immune system was lower than normal and told me to stay in.*
- *Got it very late. Week 5 of the shielding and only happened because of a conversation with eye-specialist who passed it to my GP. [Back](#)*

### 4. If yes, was it easy to understand information on it?

- *It seemed quite long-winded - a lot to read 4-5 pages.*
- *It was a flow chart; I did not find it easy to follow.*
- *Not useful. It didn't help with shopping. Frustrated. Spent hours with supermarkets trying to get a slot. I was really stuck at the beginning. It took 5 weeks for me to get support. [Back](#)*

### 11. Where have you found information or advice about the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic?

- *From GP, where I heard there was support to collect medication and from the manager from the building. I don't want too much information, when you are older just happy for the family to advise you.*
- *I just ignore everything, I don't read papers or news, just stay inside in quarantine.*
- *Watches the news but I find it a bit depressing.*
- *Daughter tells me what I need to know, and she also orders food to be delivered.*
- *Hospital consultant initially and specific interest website searches.*
- *Have specialist doctor/medication [for pre-existing condition] through Healthcare at Home - they sent lots of information, some of it specifically about condition. They also sent an app called Healthcare Anywhere which I used.*
- *Watches government briefing every day. Gets information from 'what I'm seeing on TV'.*
- *Neighbour gave me details of people to contact for support.*

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- *I live in a residential home; they have provided leaflets and lots of information about the coronavirus.*
- *Nurse phoned me about my diabetes and told me about it. [back](#)*

### 13. Was it easy to understand the information about how to keep yourself and others safe during the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic?

- *I followed the daily advise from the government briefing, however sometimes they were very confusing. Sometimes I found it a little daunting.*
- *It's all about personal choice now. For example, I haven't worn a mask as I find them intimidating, but I don't go out anywhere to use them. Masks have been an on and off thing. The government have changed their mind. At first it was to protect the NHS so no-one rushed out to get all the masks.*
- *There's a lot of information out there. It's difficult to work out what's true information. Conflicting about what you can and can't do - still waiting today. It wasn't made that clear that stuff about the bubble doesn't apply if you're shielding. People don't realise that.*
- *Used common sense but read up and have a knowledgeable daughter. I do research it.*
- *When the rules changed, we've stuck to the original rules. Don't understand why the rules changed and felt uncomfortable with it. Applied common sense.*
- *Found information a bit muddy at times.*
- *Basically, I thought about it and read about it" and talked to my daughter.*
- *Confusing at times not always clear what the government was/is saying. [back](#)*

### 14. Did you find it difficult to get clear information or advice about any particular topics?

- *Accessing repeat prescription medications.*
- *Whether or not I can be tested. No information on anything. I don't know whether they can test if you've had it or not. Had a temperature and a cough in Jan/Feb. A friend had it about 10 days afterwards. Would like to know if I had it or not.*
- *How to get dentist, chiropody and manging physical health conditions*
- *How blood tests required have been managed?*
- *Unsure about wearing a mask. Having a mask is a mystery to me now as I haven't been out. I'm worried about my daughter going out, but she wears masks and gloves. If I go out now, I'm not terribly sure how it all works. I can see it winding down, but I don't want to be the last out.*
- *Conflicting information - on Facebook group for people with my particular type of leukaemia. The advice has varied between different people's experiences and advice from different consultants - not sure if I'm high risk*

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or not. Even Hammersmith Hospital which is a centre of excellence conflicts with advice from other hospitals. Personal feedback from my consultant is clear but not same as official guidance.

- *Shielding people who are at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19*
- *Mainly for shielding group, They [government?] said this week there'd be more information but there haven't been updates. It was a huge mess when we got letters. They're all generic. My partner got his roughly 6 weeks ago but it still says shield for 12 weeks. From today? Some got letters straight away, others had to phone their GP to get a letter. Today they said everyone will get an individual letter before 30th June. That's 2 million people, that's not going to happen. It's a big burden on the NHS as consultants have to check individual patient details. My partner can't work at home so needs to know when he can go back.*
- *Issues with getting physio [for wife] getting hold of people once my wife had left hospital. People were great in hospital but when she left she only had written instructions for physio - but it was tricky to get other support [for physio]*
- *Found it difficult to get information about who to contact for help with shopping and medication*
- *Accessing help in my local community (e.g. getting groceries or picking up medication)*
- *No information on local infection rates. [Back](#)*

## 15. Did you find any specific information or sources of information especially helpful?

- *Portishead Mutual Aid Group was very helpful.*
- *Speaking to friends*
- *Local Coronavirus Facebook group in Portishead was especially useful - information about local shops and deliveries continues to be useful.*
- *NHS and Gov.UK websites*
- *I look in the local paper to get information about shop deliveries etc.*
- *Shielding group on Facebook*
- *Letters from the NHS explained I had to stay indoors.*
- *Government website for information was more consistent than the newspapers. [Back](#)*

## 17. If yes, how would you rate the communication received about the changes?

- *Wife admitted to hospital, but I had no follow-up call from hospital or GP. No complaining just would be nice to have a comfort call.*
- *At beginning of lockdown, I had a blood test booked at Southmead. I had to chase them to know if I had to go in or not. I went and wore a mask - I was quite stressed and alarmed that no staff were wearing masks or social*

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distancing. Felt worried that I was high risk, going into a hospital to do the blood test where they were treating Covid. I thought people would be wearing PPE.

- Several different hospital appointments and no communication. Had outstanding appointments but no-one contacted me about it, and they were all cancelled.
- Sycamore Lodge [spouse had to go to a care home] - they contact me 3 times a week...I have video call with this wife. They are brilliant.
- Monthly check up over the phone instead of going into the BRI. The service was very well organised.
- District nurse visits once a week and wears the PPE
- I need eye exam at Bristol Eye hospital. Eye exam not done due to coronavirus. I had my injection without eye exam. I have these injections every 3 months
- Prior to lockdown I was referred to the Mental Health Recovery team and told I would have a call from Primary Care Liaison every week. I did not receive any calls and when I phoned to inquire the person on the phone was very rude. A month ago, I was contacted and told I have been accepted onto recovery care and that they will be in touch in due course. I am still waiting. All other care has been very good. The mental health care has been poor.
- Diagnosed with cancer during pandemic and was well looked after by several different people; GP, St Michaels hospital, BRI, Cosham, South Bristol and Oncology. [Back](#)

## 20. If yes, how was your experience? (Contacting your local GP surgery)

- Very organised when ordering my prescription.
- I have regular injection every month, the surgery explained the changes clearly. I waited in my car until I was phoned to come into the surgery. It was all very organised.
- They phoned back the next day
- The Dr rang me to check I was OK and that they wanted me to have a blood test. I did explain that I wasn't keen and he agreed I didn't have to.
- I didn't have an appointment at the GP surgery but felt that I should have. I needed to have blood taken regularly. From what I hear you just go into the front part or wherever. They haven't been in touch. I haven't heard from anyone.
- Always excellent. If I ring them and for example there's a problem with B [wife] at Southmead they back me up.
- Excellent: told me straight away what to do and quickly
- I was worried as I had a cough, I had seen the same Doctor before lockdown with my Asthma and was reassured.

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- Spoke to the GP Practice and on the same day they sorted everything quickly
- I was telephoned back twice and looked after well. I did miss seeing a Doctor face to face. [Back](#)

## 22. Have you felt isolated and/or lonely?

- It was OK to start, but as a widow, I used to being alone, but starting to get a bit harder.
- Missing wife but keeping busy.
- Yes, I have felt lonely at times. I have lived on my own for 20 yrs so it hasn't been too much of a change. My neighbour and I phoned and texted each other.
- It's driving me nuts not being able to go out. Everything's closed.
- Not a great deal of difference. I miss choosing what I'd like in my shopping. Normally my son visits once a week to shop and my daughter visits every 10 days.
- Lost wife 5 years ago, so used to doing my own things.
- It's been alright, used to being at home. All family are around the country so used to it. Not a big change. I've been furloughed but this helps as I have a young child.
- Very up and down. Some days are fine, others I'm really fed up and desperate to go out and see people.
- Lonely rather than isolated. Not necessarily the lockdown. It's because B [spouse] isn't here. That's been a bigger change than lockdown.
- I miss meeting friends for lunch, keep fit classes to help with joint movement and coffee mornings at the Methodist church. I have been unable to see my family and miss my grandchildren.
- Living alone and shielding it is very lonely and isolating unable to meet with friends and family.
- I've got a list of people to call. I cut out pictures from magazines and papers and put joke bubbles on them and then send them to people. They phone back to say they got the card. So I send cards and chat to people.
- Finding solation difficult, not being able to see family and go out.
- Being unable to see my grandchildren and daughters. I have been shielding because of my cancer this has been a difficult time for me. I speak to my family every day. [Back](#)

## 23. Has isolation affected your health and wellbeing (for example, with loss of access to community activities)

- Yes, missing my keep fit classes from Age UK. I usually go twice a week.
- I have been unable to use the bus to travel and see friends.
- It's difficult opening containers to access meals. I have problems with my hands.

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- *I miss having a cup of tea with my neighbour.*
- *Miss social contact more than anything*
- *I'm used to living on my own. My husband's been dead for 20 years. A month ago, I felt like one of the lucky ones. I had plenty of phone calls. Now I feel trepidation taking my first steps out of the door. It's going to be awful I know it is. It's just been that little bit too long. My mobility isn't good. Just been in the house. I don't know how I'll be when I leave the house. I don't know if I've deteriorated in the last 3 months. 1st month I lost a lot of weight.*
- *Normally I go to the gym, do yoga - feeling fitness level is rubbish. It's a hard balance with a lung condition as I need to do enough to be healthy but not go crazy. There are lots of community activities where we live and usually get involved with, but now I can't.*
- *I've never had to see help outside. I've always been very independent. It's difficult to acknowledge that I needed to seek help.*
- *Missing lunches and shopping and seeing family who live far away.*
- *Been up and down. Walking has been hard which gets me down. Has had pain which 'got me down' but 'I've coped'.*
- *Occasionally, as I lost my husband a year ago, so it's been very strange - got a bit low and anxious for first 3-4 weeks but as we understood more about the virus, I felt less anxious.*
- *I don't mind staying at home as I struggle with my mental health and find it difficult being out. I really miss seeing my friends, family and my neighbour who helps with housework*
- *Initially it was ok, we are lucky we have a garden and good neighbours. After a couple of weeks, we felt claustrophobic. We missed not being able to see our grandchildren. [Back](#)*

## 25. How happy are you with the support you have received?

- *Quick and cheery. Very Good.*
- *Help with shopping. Healthwatch put me in touch with Mutual Aid in Portishead who organised my shopping. It was an excellent service.*
- *The minute I rang for food - I had 2 or 3 numbers, the next minute there was a response from community volunteers. They would bend over backwards, and they would ring you, they never took it upon themselves [to swap in things]. They were very conscious to do the right thing.*
- *I should say, very grateful. You can relax if you know if you run out of food they'd be there.*
- *Received government help [food box] but then got a regular slot through Tesco. Friends have been good, and a couple of people have checked to see if we needed anything.*
- *It's been very tough. What I've found most useful was when I did get contact. Not only were they lovely but they phoned and texted and said, 'I'm off*



shopping tomorrow do you want anything?' It's proactive rather than just, phone if you need.

- I think people have been wonderful. It's been out of this virus thing and I hope it continues, people being friendly. I'm regularly contacted by people and I'm grateful for it.
- Help with getting my prescription, posting letters and some shopping although I did most of my shopping online. Covid 19 Nailsea group have been very helpful.
- I needed help with benefits as there was a mix up with my renewal. I contacted Healthwatch who put me in touch with a small charity that helps with energy bills
- Healthwatch is fabulous. They put me in touch with Mutual Aid in Portishead. I would like to say a big thank you to Healthwatch North Somerset and Mutual Aid volunteers. Thank you, you were all brilliant! [Back](#)

## 26. If we have another lockdown, is there anything you would like to see relating to health and social care services?

- Blood test required. How is that managed?
- Government not to play politics - keep to the rules
- Foodboxes should be improved - poor contents and make it easier to inform you (council) that I no longer want them - has used online and now left a note on front door so hope they get the message.
- Comfort calls would be useful.
- One time getting an inhaler - husband shielding for me as letter said if not we'd have to sleep in separate rooms and keep 2 metres apart. Supermarkets don't recognise this. They say I have a partner who could collect it, but we're shielding as a family. Stressful to get delivery slots.
- Doctors surgeries could list anyone over the age of 70 and contact them to see if they need anything as people now falling through the gaps - non-digital and using GP surgeries.
- Clearer information about testing. Information about an antidote.
- It's very difficult to get shopping without the letter.
- Considering it's the first time it's been experienced it's been amazing in my humble opinion.
- I think people have been wonderful. It's been out of this virus thing and I hope it continues, people being friendly. I'm regularly contacted by people and I'm grateful for it.
- Zoom/video calls for Doctors appointments. Difficult to find information about local areas for infection rates, it would be helpful to know the numbers of infection or the r rate for local towns.
- I had a Warden when I first moved in. There hasn't been a Warden for some time, I really miss having a warden and think it would have made all the difference during the coronavirus pandemic.

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- *There is supposed to be an age restriction where the resident lives, this is not being adhered to. There is a flat that is used short term for hospital discharges and prison discharges not for the elderly. There is concern amongst the residents.*
- *Clearer communication regarding what community support is available for example: who to contact when ordering shopping*
- *Communication could be improved as I did not receive anything other than texts from the government that I had to shield. Also, the communication between organisations, when I called Healthwatch they sent me to a North Somerset community organisation (not sure of the name) who sent me back to Healthwatch, so I gave up. I found help on a local Facebook shielding group which has been great.*
- *Couldn't get online delivery of food for the first 8 weeks. Supermarkets were very slow to organise this. Once up and running the food delivery was very good. Support we had for prescriptions and food drops was very good.*
- *More testing to be available locally at GP practice or at local hospital or car park. This would have shown more accurate numbers of how many people had the virus locally and we may have been able to move about sooner.*
- *I was unable to get shopping delivered there were no slots available, I kept trying and eventually gave up. My son helped with the shopping and I found some local small shops that delivered. I had a leaflet delivered 3 and a half months after the lockdown started with information about local services for people shielding.*
- *Better communication and understanding from Mental health services and social care services*
- *Better advertising about help available in local areas*
- *Help with shopping I was unable to get a slot for online shopping. My brother shops for me.*
- *Maybe we could have had people contact us. Some contact from Macmillan nurses would have been good. We have not had any support during lockdown. The council phoned last week to see if we how we were and if we were receiving food parcels, we have not been receiving anything my daughter has been helping us. The first food parcel arrived last week.*

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## Appendix 1:

**healthwatch**  
Bristol

**healthwatch**  
North Somerset

**healthwatch**  
South Gloucestershire



**Your Healthwatch team realises you may have questions or concerns about coronavirus - and we're here to help!**

**Whether it's finding important health information, directing you to community support or a chat to help you through this difficult time**

**Visit our website to tell us your health and social care stories**

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South Glos 07944373235**

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#HWcovidcommunity**



# CORONAVIRUS



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