



MRS Post-Covid-19 Lockdown Guidance:

Guidance Note: 70 Years Old and Over

21st May 2020

Introduction

The aim of this Guidance Note is to give context to support the current MRS guidance on individuals defined as 'clinically extremely vulnerable' and 'clinically vulnerable' and particularly how this applies to interviewees and participants who are 70 years old and over.

MRS is actively working with government to determine if the requirements regarding the 70-year olds and over can be clarified further.

Context

MRS advice is based on our current understanding of HMG's guidance and support on COVID-19 (link: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) which is subject to continuous development. MRS will update and publish accordingly, but it remains the responsibility of research practitioners to keep up to date.

At the time of writing Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have adopted specific measures. We tried to cover them extensively, but given the fast pace of changes and updates, research practitioners are required to give priority to local guidance i.e. where research practice takes place.

It should be noted the MRS guidance does not replace government advice; it is meant to supplement the official sources with the addition of some research considerations. Remember to continue to check the up-to-date guidance on the [government website](#).

It is also important that research practitioners continue to gain and retain the confidence of the public regarding the aims and value of our sector's activities.

At a time when there remains a high level of concern about social contact, the necessity and need for face to face data collection, as opposed to any other data collection method, should be a key consideration when determining its use.

Interpretation of Requirements

When requirements use the word "must" these are mandatory requirements and is a principle or practice that applies the MRS Code of Conduct, which Members and Company Partners are obliged to follow.

The requirements which use the phrase "should" describe implementation and denotes a recommended practice.

“May” or “can” refer to the ability to do something, the possibility of something, as well as granting permission.

Relevant Definitions

Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals: *individuals who have specific underlying health conditions that make them extremely vulnerable to severe illness if they contact Covid-19. At the time of writing the government’s definition of clinically extremely vulnerable people may include the following individuals:*

- 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 chronic obstructive pulmonary (COPD).
- People with rare diseases 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.

Disease severity, history or treatment levels will also affect who is in the group. People who fall in this group should have been contacted to tell them they are clinically extremely vulnerable. See current government guidance (published on 5th May 2020): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#who-is-clinically-extremely-vulnerable>

Clinically vulnerable people: *individuals who may be at increased risk from Covid-19, including those aged 70 or over, and those with some underlying health conditions. At the time of writing the government’s definition of clinically vulnerable people was defined as individuals who are:*

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab each year on medical grounds):
 - chronic (long-term) mild to moderate respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
 - chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
 - chronic kidney disease
 - chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
 - chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson’s disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), or cerebral palsy
 - diabetes

- a weakened immune system as the result of certain conditions, treatments like chemotherapy, or medicines such as steroid tablets
- being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
- pregnant women

See: current government guidance (published on 11 May 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>

Participant: *is any individual or organisation from or about whom data is collected.*

Research Practitioners: *includes all individuals within the research supply-chain e.g. researchers, moderators, interviewers, recruiters, mystery shoppers, contractors, freelancers and temporary workers.*

Application of the Definitions of Clinically Vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

Research Practitioners

The MRS [Undertaking Safe Face to Face Data Collection Guidance](#) (issued on 14th May 2020) contains the following requirements for research practitioners:

Requirement 8

Research practitioners who are classified as 'clinically extremely vulnerable' individuals (see definitions) are advised by the government to stay at home at all times and avoid any face to face contact i.e. to shield themselves. As such research practitioners who are clinically extremely vulnerable must not undertake any face to face data collection activities. Research practitioners who are clinically extremely vulnerable may undertake and/or be selected for other methods of data collection e.g. telephone, online.

Application of Requirement 8

This is a mandatory requirement. If research practitioners are classified as clinically extremely vulnerable, they must not undertake face to face data collection.

Research practitioners within this group who are fit and wish to work may undertake other forms of data collection such as telephone or online data collection.

Requirement 9

Research practitioners that are clinically vulnerable individuals (see definitions) are advised by the government to stay at home as much as possible, and if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household. As a result of this government advice, research practitioners who are classified as clinically vulnerable should not undertake face to face data collection. Research practitioners who are clinically vulnerable (e.g. those 70 years and over) may undertake and/or be selected for other methods of data collection e.g. telephone, online.

Application of Requirement 9

This is recommended practice and is not mandatory. If research practitioners are classified as clinically vulnerable, they should not undertake face to face data collection. However, if research practitioners within this group, specifically those who are 70 years or over, are fit and wish to work, they may be considered for face to face data collection.

Before any 70-year-old or over research practitioners are used for face to face data collection a risk assessment must be undertaken to consider any risks and identify mitigations of using research practitioners from this age group. The determination of

whether to use 70-year-olds or over will depend on the outcome of any initial risk assessment.

Research practitioners within this group who are fit and wish to work may also undertake other forms of data collection such as telephone or online data collection

Participants

The MRS [Undertaking Safe Face to Face Data Collection Guidance](#) (issued on 14th May 2020) contains the following requirements for participants:

Requirement 17:

When research practitioners have determined participants are suitable and willing to participate in face to face data collection, they must undertake screener questions to establish whether participants:

- a) are experiencing any flu-like and/or Covid-19 symptoms*
- b) been diagnosed with Covid-19*
- c) been in close contact with any individuals experiencing any flu-like and/or Covid-19 symptoms*
- d) been in close contact with any individuals diagnosed with Covid-19*
- e) are shielding or caring for individuals vulnerable to Covid-19*
- f) are defined as either Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or Clinically Vulnerable*
- g) are content and confident to participate in face to face data collection, specifically any activities in which they may be asked to engage e.g. group activities with other participants in a central location*
- h) have any specific concerns regarding participating in face to face data collection*

Requirement 18:

Research practitioners must ensure that participants who respond to screener questions which indicate they have Covid-19, have a high risk of infection and/or are shielding or caring for individuals vulnerable to Covid-19 and/or are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or Clinically Vulnerable are not recruited for face to face data collection. These participants may however be recruited for other methods of data collection e.g. online or telephone studies if it is unlikely to expose research practitioners to potential infection.

Application of Requirements 17 and 18:

The current government guidance states that individuals who are clinically vulnerable are at a higher risk of severe illness from Covid-19. Clinically vulnerable individuals are advised to stay at home as much as possible, and, if they go out, to take care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.

During recruitment for data collection activities 70-years old and over participants, and others classified as clinically vulnerable, will be approached to be participants through the application of usual data collection methods e.g. be being selected via random probability/location door-to-door research techniques.

Research practitioners must design any face to face data collection screeners and pre-data collection approaches to ensure clinically vulnerable participants are identified initially at recruitment (via screener or similar) before any further data collection takes place. Research practitioners must ensure that the time taken to determine clinically vulnerable participants is kept to a minimum.

Upon identification of clinically vulnerable participants, including those aged 70-years and older who are willing to participate in research must be directed to undertake any subsequent data collection via other data collection methods e.g. by phone, online, etc.

The only current exception to this requirement is research which is being undertaken in conjunction with government public health activities (e.g. the Department of Health and Social Care project which is tracking the rate of infection and aims to understand infection and recovery rates).

Research Practitioners are ethically required to refer and respect the ethical principles of the profession. When planning and executing their projects they must carefully balance a number of issues, among which:

- Adhering to government guidance
- Protecting the health and welfare of 70-year olds and over and others classified as clinically vulnerable
- Understanding the attitudes and behaviours of 70-year olds and over and others classified as clinically vulnerable
- Ensuring that the needs of over 70-year olds and over clinically vulnerable participants are being considered
- Avoiding potential age and health discrimination