To: General practices

cc. Community pharmacies,
Regional chief pharmacists

NHS England and NHS Improvement
Skipton House
80 London Road
London
SE1 6LH

31 May 2022

Dear colleagues,

New patient cohorts eligible for COVID-19 treatments

On 30 May 2022, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) published an Independent Advisory Group report which identifies cohorts deemed to be at the highest risk of an adverse COVID outcome.

The UK-wide clinical access policy for COVID-19 treatments for non-hospitalised patients has been updated to include additional groups of patients the report identifies as potentially eligible for treatment. These changes take effect from **13 June 2022.**

Hospital consultants have been asked to advise these patients of their eligibility, **but if they are not contacted directly you may need to refer these patients for assessment by a CMDU if they test positive**.

Key information you must know:

- Please familiarise yourself with the latest policy which widens availability to include patients with chromosomal disorders, some cancer patients, some additional haematological diseases, and additional criteria for those with immune-mediated inflammatory disorders (IMID)

- Highest risk patients eligible for COVID treatments can continue to access free lateral flow tests via gov.uk or 119. The full list of eligible patient criteria is here.

- Patients need to report a positive lateral flow test via gov.uk or 119. Note that patients can only use lateral flow tests supplied by the Government. Tests bought from a shop (including pharmacies) cannot currently be registered via GOV.UK or 119.

- Most patients will be contacted by a COVID-19 Medicine Delivery Unit (CMDU) following their positive registered test result to arrange assessment and treatment. However, a small proportion of patients may need to be referred by GP practices

or 111. You can refer potentially eligible patients (see Annex A) if they have tested positive via a PCR test or any lateral flow test. Guidance on this is provided below.

- You can refer patients to the local CMDU using the electronic Referral Service (e-RS) or the locally agreed alternative if applicable. Of note, one of the treatment options – nirmatrelvir+ritonavir (Paxlovid) – has multiple potential drug interactions so inclusion of the patient's medications in the referral is vital.

- Your continued help in recruiting to the PANORAMIC study which is testing antivirals in a wider group of patients including over-50s would be appreciated (see PANORAMIC for further information)

A pathway flowchart (Annex A) is included below with a reminder about further guidance on these treatments (Annex B). NHS England and NHS Improvement guidance on the treatment and assessment of patients with COVID-19 is here.

Please ensure this letter is shared among staff at your practice including all those triaging patients and administrative and reception staff who these patients may engage with when contacting the practice.

Yours sincerely,

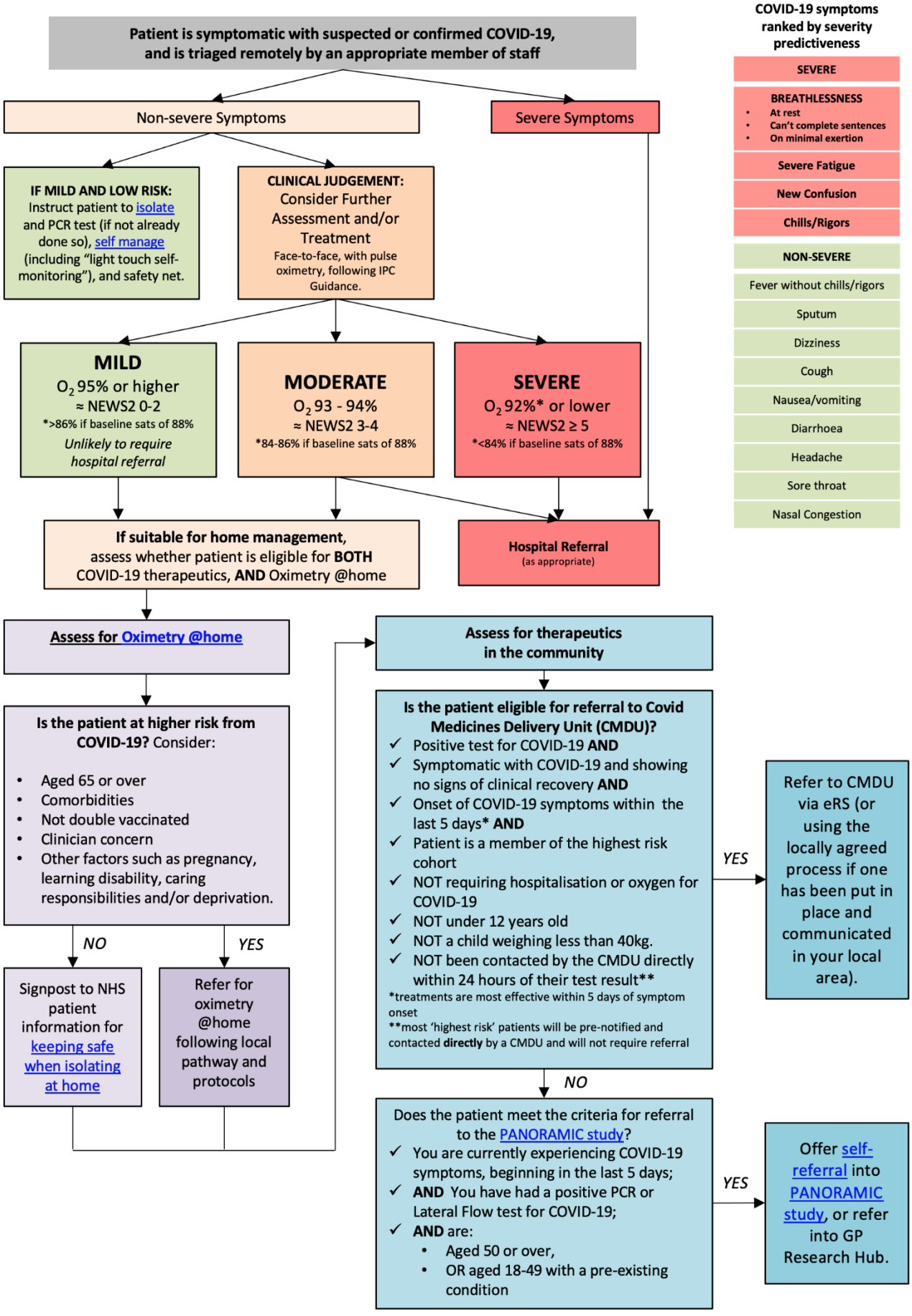




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ANNEX A – Patient Pathway



ANNEX B: Guidance for general practice teams and community pharmacies.

How will patients receive treatment?

Most of the highest risk patients have received a letter or email telling them in advance they may be eligible for these treatments in the event they test positive for COVID-19. They should also have lateral flow tests to keep at home.

Patients can demonstrate coronavirus infection via a positive lateral flow test result that has been registered via gov.uk or 119. If a patient was previously sent a PCR test kit they can keep it, but are being asked not to use it for routine testing. They might instead be asked to use the test as part of surveillance arrangements following treatment.

Many 'new entrants' to cohorts (e.g. new diagnoses of multiple sclerosis) will be made aware of the policy via their hospital specialists and will be able to request lateral flow tests. If you become aware of eligible patients who have not yet received an initial supply of test kits, please encourage them to request a supply via gov.uk or 119.

Each integrated care system (ICS) has established one or more local CMDUs to roll out nMABs or antivirals as a treatment for COVID-19. Your local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) or ICS will be able to advise you of the site of the local CMDU(s).

There are two routes by which eligible patients may access treatment:

1. **NHS outreach**: In the event of a positive registered lateral flow, a local CMDU will contact the majority of patients directly to discuss the treatment and confirm eligibility. The CMDU will arrange treatment if appropriate.

2. **Patient in-reach**: A small proportion of registered lateral flow results cannot be matched to a patient's health record. We are encouraging patients not contacted directly by the NHS within 24 hours of a positive registered lateral flow result to phone their GP practice (in hours) or 111 (out of hours) for an urgent referral to a CMDU. GPs and 111 can refer these patients to CMDUs via eRS (or the locally agreed alternative if applicable). GP practices **will not** need to prescribe treatment; only refer.

GPs can still refer potentially eligible patients if they have tested positive for COVID-19. COVID-19 treatments must be delivered quickly following symptom onset. Practices and 111 should use the clinical policy document to help identify if a symptomatic patient is potentially eligible. GPs should check the patient meets the criteria for referral. The CMDU will confirm eligibility and discuss treatment options.

Who is eligible for treatments

More detailed information on patient cohorts is in the Department of Health and Social Care commissioned Independent Advisory Group report. People considered to be at highest risk currently includes some people who have:

- chromosomal disorders affecting the immune system, including Down's syndrome
- certain types of cancer or have received treatment for certain types of cancer
- sickle cell disease
- certain conditions affecting their blood
- chronic kidney disease (CKD) stage 4 or 5
- severe liver disease
- had an organ transplant
- certain autoimmune or inflammatory conditions (such as rheumatoid arthritis or inflammatory bowel disease)
- HIV or AIDS who have a weakened immune system
- inherited or acquired conditions affecting their immune system
- rare neurological conditions: multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, Huntington's disease or myasthenia gravis.

General practices: how should patients be referred for treatment?

If an eligible symptomatic patient does not receive instructions from the CMDU on how to access treatment, you will need to refer the patient to a local CMDU using the electronic Referral Service (e-RS).

We have asked ICSs to list CMDUs on the e-RS under the 'Infectious Diseases' specialty and clinic type 'Not otherwise specified'. CMDU service names will include the wording 'COVID Medicine Delivery Unit (CMDU)'. Using e-RS will ensure that there is a record of the referral and that receiving CMDUs have accurate details for the patient, but you may need to use alternative referral routes if these have been agreed locally.

Referral information will only need to include the patient details, the date of the registered lateral flow test, and the condition(s) that you think might make them eligible for treatment. Please include any medications, allergies and preferred contact details as normal. The medications are especially important as Paxlovid has multiple potential drug interactions.

GPs do not need to prescribe COVID-19 treatments under this policy. Practices should refer potentially eligible patients to CMDUs.

For pharmacists – if a patient in these highest risk cohorts with a positive lateral flow test contacts the pharmacy then advise them to stay at home and contact their GP for a referral to a CMDU, or to call NHS 111 if out of hours, if they have not been contacted within 24 hours of a positive test result.

Where will patients receive nMABs or antivirals treatment?

nMABs and some antiviral treatments are administered intravenously so a patient will typically need to safely travel to a CMDU site. If the CMDU decides that an oral antiviral is the most appropriate treatment option, these will be dropped off to a patient's home, either via a friend or family member of the patient, or via a delivery service.

Further information for patients

For any general patient queries about COVID-19 treatments, please refer patients to https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/treatments-for-coronavirus/. For more detailed information about access and eligibility, please refer to the policy.