



INDIVIDUALS WHO MIGHT BE AT INCREASED RISK FROM THE VIRUS



Dr Peter Moss has been a consultant in infectious diseases since 1999. He has worked within the full range of infectious diseases, and was the Director of Infection Prevention and Control for more than 10 years. Since 2020 much of his time has been devoted to managing patients with COVID-19. Dr Moss will be issuing a series of bulletins to help inform the public of the medical background of COVID-19. These bulletins are aimed to help provide reassurance and advice to the community during the transition towards eventually 'Living with COVID'.

Once quarantine restrictions are removed, we will start to see SARS CoV2 within the community on St Helena. Although the omicron variant is much less harmful than previous strains of the virus it is highly infectious, and it is likely that most people on the Island will catch it at some point. The illness is usually so mild that many people will not even know that they have the virus. Others will just feel as though they have a cold, with perhaps a headache and muscle pain. We now know that even if you have other health conditions, SARS CoV2 is unlikely to make you seriously unwell.

During the early stages of the pandemic in 2020 you may have received a letter identifying you as someone who is 'clinically extremely vulnerable' or 'high-risk', and been advised to shield or take other specific precautions. We now know that most people with other health problems are not determined as 'clinically extremely vulnerable' or 'high-risk'.

There are a very small number of people who, in spite of vaccination, may be at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19; this is usually due to a weakened immune system. We have already identified those people on St Helena who are in this group, and will be contacting them directly with specific advice. Unless you have been contacted in this way, you should follow the same guidance as everyone else on staying safe and preventing the spread of COVID-19 on St Helena.

Everyone is strongly advised to get immunized against the virus, including pregnant women. If you have not yet received the vaccine, I recommend you to do so (unless you are one of the very rare people who has a true allergy to the vaccine). Having two doses of vaccine provides effective protection against serious illness; a third (booster) dose may provide additional protection. Some people may also be offered immunization against 'flu'; it is the start of the 'flu' season in South Africa, and we do not want to have this virus circulating on St Helena at the same time as SARS CoV2.

Below is a list of chronic illnesses that could continue to put people at risk of getting seriously ill from COVID-19, despite vaccination:

- Down's syndrome
- Certain types of cancer (such as a blood cancer like leukaemia or lymphoma)
- Sickle cell disease
- Certain conditions affecting your blood
- Chronic kidney disease (CKD) stage 4 or 5
- Severe liver disease
- Someone who has had an organ or bone marrow transplant
- Certain autoimmune or inflammatory conditions
- HIV or AIDS and have a weakened immune system
- A condition affecting your immune system
- A rare condition affecting the brain or nerves (multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, Huntington's disease or myasthenia gravis)
- A severe problem with the brain or nerves, such as cerebral palsy
- A severe or multiple learning disabilities
- A weakened immune system due to a medical treatment.