

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Professor Sir Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD)12/2024

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/HSC Trusts/NIAS

Deputy Secretary SPPG

GP Medical Advisers, SPPG

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward
distribution to practice staff) and Community

Pharmacies

OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

RQIA (for onward transmission to all independent
providers including independent hospitals)

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Our Ref: HSS(MD)12/2024

Date: 16 April 2024

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleague

COVID-19 TREATMENTS: UPDATED NICE GUIDANCE TA878 (Nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir, sotrovimab and tocilizumab for treating COVID-19)

In March 2024, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) updated the Technology appraisal guidance (TA878) 'Nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir, sotrovimab and tocilizumab for treating COVID-19' to update the recommendation on nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir to expand the groups eligible for treatment. The original recommendation on casirivimab plus imdevimab has also been removed following the withdrawal of the conditional marketing authorisation for casirivimab plus imdevimab for treating COVID-19. Please see the published guidance on the [NICE website](#).

It is acknowledged that full implementation of this updated guidance may require additional time beyond the normal implementation period for NICE guidance in order to put in place the necessary treatment pathways and ensure the necessary capacity, knowledge and expertise is in place to support equitable access for the expanded population.

In addition to people with an increased risk for progression to severe COVID-19 as defined in [TA878](#) section 5, with effect from 10 April 2024 the HSC will expand access to nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir for the following groups:

- people aged 85 years and over

- people with end-stage heart failure who have a long-term ventricular assistance device
- people on the organ transplant waiting list
- people aged 70 years and over, or who have a BMI of 35 kg/m² or more, diabetes or heart failure, and:
 - are resident in a care home, or
 - are already hospitalised.

By June 2025, implementation of the full recommendation would also provide access for people who are aged 70 years and over, or who have a body mass index (BMI) of 35 kg/m² or more, diabetes or heart failure in addition to the groups referenced above. Please see Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) Service notification detailing the expectations for implementation via HSC.

Please note that NICE Technology appraisal guidance [[TA878](#)] has been endorsed for implementation within Health and Social Care (HSC) via the SPPG extant Managed Entry process, as detailed on the SPPG [Managed Entry website](#). **SPPG will communicate the expectations on implementation to HSC Trusts in their Service Notification, in accordance with the processes outlined in HSC (SQSD) 12/22.**

In addition, [NICE COVID-19 rapid guideline: managing COVID-19 \(NG191\)](#) has been amended to reflect the update.

Actions required

HSC Trusts are asked to take the following immediate steps to support treatment of patients with COVID-19:

1. Consider prescribing COVID treatments in line with the [NICE Technology appraisal guidance Nirmatrelvir plus ritonavir, sotrovimab and tocilizumab for treating COVID-19' \[TA878\]](#), noting that the groups of patients potentially eligible has been expanded. Please see the SPPG [Managed Entry website](#) that details the decision for acceptance of TA878 under the SPPG extant Managed Entry process and SPPG will communicate the expectations on implementation in their Service Notification.
2. Clinicians may wish to refer to [NICE's rapid guideline on managing COVID-19 \(NG191\)](#) for medicines licensed, and currently used, in the management of COVID-19 for which the NICE multiple technology appraisal (MTA) recommendations have not yet been published.

3. Continue to advise eligible patients under your care, including any newly diagnosed patients, of their eligibility for COVID-19 treatments and how to access COVID-19 treatments.

GP and GP Out of Hours service is asked to:

4. Continue to refer eligible patients to the HSC Trust OCT service.
5. Continue to advise eligible patients under your care, including any newly diagnosed patients, of their eligibility for COVID-19 treatments and how to access COVID-19 treatments.

The **Strategic Planning and Performance Group** is asked to:

6. Continue to work with HSC Trusts and Primary Care to identify patients eligible for treatment, and to support promotion of awareness among patients and their carers regarding how to access treatments.

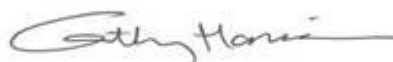
Further enquiries should in the first instance be directed to your hospital pharmacy team.

Please note that future updates to NICE COVID-19 treatment guidance will be communicated via extant business as usual processes from SPPG to HSC.

Yours sincerely



Professor Sir Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Professor Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)

Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency

Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, SPPG (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)

Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts

Director of Social Care and Children, SPPG

Family Practitioner Service Leads, SPPG (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)

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Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts

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Joe Brogan, Assistant Director, Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) (*for onward distribution to SPPG Pharmacy and Medicines Management Team and community pharmacists*)

Regional Medicines Information Service, Belfast HSC Trust

Regional Pharmaceutical Procurement Service, Northern HSC Trust

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Michael Donaldson, Head of Dental Services, SPPG (*for distribution to all General Dental Practitioners*)

Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services, SPPG (*for distribution to Community Optometrists*)

Trade Union Side

Clinical Advisory Team

Louise McMahan, Director of Integrated Care, SPPG

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<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>