

Department of Rheumatology

Helpline Number: 01384 244789

24/3/2020

[Patient Name
Patient address Line 1
Patient address Line 2
Patient address Line 3]
Date

IMPORTANT: PERSONAL

Your NHS number: [NHS NUMBER]

Dear [Patient],

IMPORTANT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU SAFE FROM CORONAVIRUS

Your safety and the continued provision of the care and treatment you need is a priority for us. This letter gives you advice on how to protect yourself and access the care and treatment you need.

The NHS has identified you, or the named person you care for, as someone who may be at risk of severe illness if you catch Coronavirus (also known as COVID-19). This is because you have an underlying disease or health condition that may mean if you catch the virus, you are more likely to be admitted to hospital than others.

The ADVICE TO PROTECT YOURSELF in the way outlined below applies to you, if you are on any of the following treatment(s) for your rheumatic condition:

1. Corticosteroids equal or more than 20 mg prednisolone per day for more than 4 weeks
2. Cyclophosphamide as tablets or infusion within the last 6 months,
3. Corticosteroids of equal or more than 5 mg per day (for more than 4 weeks) PLUS any one immunosuppressive medication, biological/monoclonal or small molecule immunosuppressant (listed under a, b and c below),
4. Any TWO agents among immunosuppressive medications, biological/monoclonals or small molecule immunosuppressants (listed in a, b or c below) with any of the illnesses listed in d below.

The current government advice is that you should be shielded from exposure to coronavirus as much as possible.

The safest course of action is for you to stay at home at all times and avoid all face-to-face contact for at least twelve weeks from today, except from carers and healthcare workers who you must see as part of your medical care.

If you are in touch with friends, family or a support network in your community who can support you to get food and medicine, follow the advice in this letter. If you do not have contacts who can help

support you go to www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable or call **0800 0288327**, the Government's dedicated helpline.

If, at any point, you think you have developed symptoms of coronavirus, such as a new, continuous cough and/or high temperature (above 37.8 °C), seek clinical advice using the NHS 111 online coronavirus service (<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/>). If you do not have access to the internet, call **NHS 111. Do this as soon as you get symptoms.**

PLEASE NOTE:

- **If you do develop symptoms of persistent cough and / or fever (above 37.8 degrees Celsius), please stop all your anti-rheumatic medication, EXCEPT hydroxychloroquine and / or any pre-existing corticosteroid dose (e.g. prednisolone) until you are better.**
- **If you have been in contact with a suspected case of Coronavirus infection, please stop all you anti-rheumatic medication EXCEPT hydroxychloroquine and / or any pre-existing corticosteroid dose (e.g. prednisolone) for at least 7 days. (If you then develop symptoms yourself, continue to stop the medication until you are better; if not, you may restart your medication).**

You, or the person you care for should:

- Strictly avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature (above 37.8 °C) and/or a new and continuous cough
- Not leave your home
- Not attend any gatherings. This includes gatherings of friends and families in private spaces e.g. family homes, weddings and religious services
- Not go out for shopping, leisure or travel. When arranging food or medication deliveries, these should be left at the door to minimise contact
- Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media
- Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services
- Regularly wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. Ask carers or support workers who visit your home to do the same.

The rest of your household should support you to stay safe and stringently follow guidance on social distancing, reducing their contact outside the home.

In your home, you should:

- minimise the time you spend with others in shared spaces (kitchen, bathroom and sitting areas) and keep shared spaces well ventilated
- aim to keep 2 metres (3 steps) away from others and encourage them to sleep in a different bed where possible
- use separate towels and, if possible, use a separate bathroom from the rest of the household, or clean the bathroom after every use
- avoid using the kitchen when others are present, take your meals back to your room to eat where possible, and ensure all kitchenware is cleaned thoroughly.

If the rest of your household are able to follow this guidance, there is no need for them to take the full protective measures to keep you safe.

You will still get the medical care you need during this period. We are considering alternative options for managing your care and will be in touch if any changes are needed.

We also advise that:

1. Carers and support workers who come to your home

Any essential carers or visitors who support you with your everyday needs can continue to visit, unless they have any of the symptoms of coronavirus. All visitors should wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, on arrival and often during the visit.

It is also a good idea to speak to your carers about what happens if one of them becomes unwell. If you need help with care but you're not sure who to contact please visit www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable.

2. Medicines that you routinely take

The government is helping pharmacies to deliver prescriptions. Prescriptions will continue to cover the same length of time as usual. If you do not currently have your prescriptions collected or delivered, you can arrange this by:

1. Asking someone who can pick up your prescription from the local pharmacy, (this is the best option, if possible);
2. Contacting your pharmacy to ask them to help you find a volunteer (who will have been ID checked) or deliver it to you. You may also need to arrange for collection or delivery of hospital specialist medication that is prescribed to you by your hospital care team.

3. Planned GP practice appointments

Wherever possible, GPs will provide care by phone, email or online. But your GP decides you need to be seen in person they will contact you to arrange a visit to the surgery or a visit in your home.

4. Planned hospital appointments

NHS England have written to us and asked to review any ongoing care that you have with us. While we endeavour to run all existing appointments as telephone consultations, it is possible that some clinics and appointments will be cancelled or postponed. We are committed to contact you if any changes need to be made to your care or treatment. Otherwise you should assume your care or treatment is taking place as planned. Please contact your hospital or clinic directly if you have any questions about a specific appointment.

5. Support with daily living

Please discuss your daily needs during this period of staying at home with carers, family, friends, neighbours or local community groups to see how they can support you. If you do not have anyone who can help you, please visit www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable.

This letter is evidence, for your employer, to show that you cannot work outside the home. You do not need to get a fit note from your GP. If you need help from the benefit system visit <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>.

6. Urgent medical attention

If you have an urgent medical question relating to your **existing** rheumatic condition, or the condition of the person you are caring for please contact us directly on our **helpline number : 01384 244789**. We will do our best to answer all calls as soon as we can, but ask you to bear with us in these challenging times.

To help the NHS provide you with the best care if you need to go to hospital as a result of catching coronavirus, we ask that you prepare a single hospital bag. This should include your emergency contact, a list of the medications you take (including dose and frequency), any information on your planned care appointments and things you would need for an overnight stay (snacks, pyjamas, toothbrush, medication etc). If you have an advanced care plan, please include that.

7. Looking after your mental well-being

We understand that this may be a worrying time and you may find staying at home and having limited contact frustrating. At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour, which can make you feel worse. Simple things you can do to stay mentally and physically active during this time include:

- look for ideas for exercises to do at home on the NHS website
- spend time doing things you enjoy – reading, cooking and other indoor hobbies
- try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water, exercise regularly, and try to avoid smoking, alcohol and recreational drugs
- try spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air, arranging space to sit and see a nice view (if possible) and get some natural sunlight. Get out into the garden or sit on your doorstep if you can, keeping a distance of at least 2 metres from others.

You can find additional advice and support from Every Mind Matters and the NHS mental health and wellbeing advice website.

PLEASE NOTE:

- If you are only on Hydroxychloroquine and/ or Sulphasalazine for your rheumatic condition, are below the age of 70 and otherwise well, you are considered 'low risk' in terms of developing severe Covid-19 infection you should continue to follow the government advice to the population around social distancing to reduce transmission of coronavirus.
- For any other treatments and situation, e.g.

Patients WITHOUT any medical conditions listed under (d), who are on a single immunosuppressive drug, biologic/monoclonal or small molecule immunosuppressant (see a, b, c below)

OR

Patients whose condition is well controlled and do not have any of the medical conditions listed in d below on a single immunosuppressive drug (see a below) plus sulphasalazine and/or hydroxychloroquine

OR

Patients whose condition is well controlled without any of the medical conditions listed under (d) below on a single immunosuppressive agent (see a below) plus a single biologic/monoclonal or small molecule immunosuppressant (see b and c below)

The risk of developing severe COVID-19 infection is considered 'moderate'. This means individuals should take extra care to follow the government advice on social distancing and have a low threshold of self-isolating if unwell or in contact with someone else who is unwell.

Further information on coronavirus, including guidance from Public Health England, can be found on the nhs.uk: and gov.uk websites:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

This letter and future updates will be added to the rheumatology department's website on the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust Website. Please check our Department's website <http://www.dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/rheumatology/> at regular intervals.

Yours sincerely,

***The Rheumatology Team at
The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust***

(a) : <u>Immunosuppressive medications</u> include: Azathioprine, Leflunomide, Methotrexate, Mycophenolate (mycophenolate mofetil or mycophenolic acid),

Ciclosporin, Tacrolimus, Sirolimus. It does **NOT** include Hydroxychloroquine or Sulphasalazine either alone or in combination.

(b) : **Biologic/monoclonal** includes:

Rituximab {Rituxan/Truxima} within last 12 months;

All anti-TNF drugs **etanercept {Enbrel/Benepali}, adalimumab {Humira/Hyrimoz}, infliximab {Remicade/Remsema}, golimumab {Somponi}, certolizumab {Cimzia}** and biosimilar variants of all of these;

Tocilizumab {RoActemra}

Abatacept {Orencia}

Belimumab {Benlysta}

Anakinra {Kineret}

Secukinumab {Consentyx}; Ixekizumab {Taltz}

Ustekinumab {Stelara}

Sarilumumab {Kevzara}

Canakinumab {Ilaris}

(c) : **Small molecules** includes: all JAK inhibitors

Baricitinib {Olmient}, Tofacitinib {Xiljanz}, Upadacitinib {Rinvoq}

(d) : **Medical conditions:**

Age >70,

Diabetes Mellitus,

Any pre-existing lung disease including asthma

Kidney/Renal impairment

Any history of Ischaemic Heart Disease

High blood pressure/Hypertension