

Patient Guidance Sheet for Joint Injections in Rheumatology During the COVID-19 Pandemic

You will be aware that COVID-19 is a new viral infection that science, medicine and the world are still learning about. One area where there is limited knowledge is on how patients that take medication that suppresses their immune system (immunosuppression) respond to COVID-19 infection. Steroid treatments (even given as injection) can suppress your immune system for a period of time.

During the first peak of the pandemic in the UK, because of lack of understanding, and concern of the potential adverse effects of steroids in patients who contract COVID-19 infection and simple risk of patients coming into contact with other people, we chose to stop carrying out steroid injections.

COVID-19 is likely to continue to impact of our lives for some time, however life must go on. We are adopting a “new normal” way of working and putting in place measures to keep people as safe as possible. We have started to offer steroid injections to patients when it is considered necessary and after discussing the risks and benefits.

The risks of having a joint injection can be divided into the risk of the drug itself i.e. steroid and the risk of visit i.e. the risk of contracting the disease when you attend the hospital.

The risk with the steroid

As steroids cause immunosuppression for a short period of time, there is a theoretical risk that having a steroid injection may alter the course of the virus if you were to contract it. However the scientific evidence to date suggests the greatest risk factors for a worse form of COVID-19 infection are: being male; over 65 years of age; in at risk ethnic group or if you have underlying health conditions such as diabetes, obesity, chronic lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease and liver disease. So if you have any of these you may choose to avoid any potential additional risk of a steroid injection. However if you have not, or you are likely to benefit a great deal from the injection, you may choose to proceed. You may wish to discuss this with friends, family or your rheumatology team.

The risk of the visit

It is a priority to minimize the risk of you being exposed to COVID-19 virus infection during your hospital visit. To reduce your risk of contact with COVID-19 there are some things the hospital and rheumatology department has set up and some that you can help with.

- Patients must not to attend if they have any:
 - COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough or loss of taste or smell) in the last 14 days.
 - Contact with a COVID-19 confirmed patient or anyone who has had the above mentioned symptoms within the last 14 days.
- Minimizing number of patients and relatives in the hospital building at any one time
 - So please attend only if you have got an appointment
 - Do not arrive more than 15 minutes before your appointment
 - Do not bring a relative into the hospital unless you need to
- You will need to wear a face covering in the hospital at all times, and will be asked to use alcohol hand gel.
- You will be asked to keep a safe distance from other people and to follow one way walking directions in corridors
- Patients will have a symptom and temperature check on arrival at the department.

After you have read this information please consider your own individual situation and what is best for you. Please do not hesitate to contact your rheumatology team or usual medical doctor for further advice.

If you have an appointment for an injection and would now like to reschedule, delay or cancel the appointment please contact the Rheumatology joint injection co-ordinator on 01384 456111 ext 3708 (Mon-Fri 8am-4pm).