

Dear Patient,

## **IMPORTANT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU SAFE FROM CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)**

Your safety and the continued provision of the care and treatment you need is a priority for the NHS. This letter includes general advice for all patients (**pages 1-2**), as well as some advice specifically for people under the care of the Rheumatology Department who are at an increased risk of severe illness if they catch Coronavirus (COVID-19) (**pages 4-5**). Further information on coronavirus, including guidance from Public Health England, can be found on the [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)<sup>1</sup> and [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)<sup>2</sup> websites.

### **GENERAL ADVICE**

#### **1. Planned hospital appointments**

Wherever possible, Rheumatology appointments will now be conducted over the phone.

If you urgently need to attend a face-to-face appointment, we will first contact you to ensure that you do not have symptoms of possible Coronavirus (COVID-19), and that it is safe for you to visit the hospital.

#### **2. Planned blood tests**

Regular blood test monitoring is essential for many treatments in Rheumatology. If these are stable, you may be contacted to ask you to attend for monitoring blood tests less frequently. To protect you from being exposed to Coronavirus, **we are no longer running a walk-in service for blood tests**. Blood tests can **only** be arranged by phoning **0121 507 6104** to book a slot in advance.

#### **3. Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Rheumatology Medication**

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

- 1. STOP** your Rheumatology Medication (unless this is Prednisolone and/or Hydroxychloroquine).
  - Steroid tablets (Prednisolone) should **NOT** be stopped, and the dose may need to be increased) so contact the Rheumatology Helpline if in doubt.
  - Hydroxychloroquine should be continued at your normal dose. Restart your other medication when you become well on consultation with the Rheumatology team.
- 2.** If your condition gets worse, or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days, then use the **NHS 111** online coronavirus service, or call **NHS 111** and tell them that if you have been taking any of the medicines listed in the table on **page 3**. For medical emergencies dial 999.

People who have confirmed Coronavirus (Covid-19) infection should use paracetamol in preference to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs ("NSAIDs" e.g. Ibuprofen, Naproxen, Etoricoxib/Arcoxia). Those currently on daily non-steroidal drugs should not stop them.

Please ring the Prescription Helpline (**0121 507 5331**) for help with **hospital-only** prescription queries.

#### **4. Urgent medical attention**

If you have an urgent medical question relating to your rheumatology condition, please contact us directly via the Rheumatology Helpline (**0121 507 5024**), or by emailing **[swbh.rheumsec@nhs.net](mailto:swbh.rheumsec@nhs.net)**.

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:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

This should include your emergency contact, a list of the medications you take (including dose and frequency), any information on future 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.

## 5. Looking after your mental well-being

We understand that this may be a worrying time, and that you may find staying at home and having limited contact frustrating. You can find additional advice and support from:

- Every Mind Matters<sup>3</sup>, or the NHS mental health and wellbeing advice website<sup>4</sup>

### **AM I AT AN INCREASED RISK OF SEVERE ILLNESS IF I CATCH CORONAVIRUS?**

Please use the table below to work out whether you are at a higher risk of severe illness if you catch Coronavirus (COVID-19). This letter can then advise you on the best course of action.

If you have a score of **3 or more**, you are advised to shield immediately. Please continue to the end of this letter which contains further information to keep you safe.

If you have a score of **2**, you may wish to self-isolate, but **MUST maintain social distance**. Please follow the general advice above, and if you wish to self-isolate, please continue to the end of this letter.

If you have a score of **1 or less**, you **MUST** maintain social distance. You do not need to continue to the end of this letter, but please do follow the general advice above.

Factors increasing risk of severe illness with Coronavirus (COVID-19)	Score
Do you have any of the following rheumatic conditions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behcet's disease</li> <li>• Cogan's syndrome</li> <li>• Cryoglobulinaemia</li> <li>• IgG4-related disease</li> <li>• Myositis (Polymyositis, Dermatomyositis)</li> <li>• Relapsing Polychondritis</li> <li>• Systemic Lupus Erythematosus</li> <li>• Systemic Sclerosis / Scleroderma</li> <li>• Vasculitis, including ANCA-associated vasculitis (Granulomatosis with Polyangiitis or GPA, Eosinophilic Granulomatosis with Polyangiitis or EGPA, Giant Cell Arteritis (GCA), Microscopic Polyangiitis or MPA), Aortitis, Polyarteritis Nodosa (PAN), Takayasu's Arteritis</li> </ul>	1
Treatment with Cyclophosphamide at any dose by mouth or by drip within last six months	3
Treatment with Prednisolone at a dose of 20mg or more (or equivalent) for more than four weeks	3
Treatment with Prednisolone at a dose of 5mg or more but less than 20mg (or equivalent) for more than four weeks	2
Treatment with <b>TWO</b> or more medications from the table on page 3	2
Treatment with any <b>ONE</b> medication from the table below	1
Are you aged over 70 OR have any of these medical conditions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diabetes</li> <li>• Any lung disease (whether related to your rheumatic condition or not)</li> <li>• Kidney problems (renal impairment)</li> <li>• Heart problems (angina, ischaemic heart disease)</li> <li>• High blood pressure (hypertension)</li> </ul>	1
Treatment with Hydroxychloroquine, Sulfasalazine alone or in combination	0

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression>

<b>Rheumatology Medications which can increase risk</b>		
<b><i>Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs</i></b>	<b><i>Biologic drugs (at home)</i></b>	<b><i>Biologic drugs (on infusion suite)</i></b>
Azathioprine	Abatacept (Orencia)	Abatacept (Orencia)
Ciclosporin	Adalimumab (Humira, Hyrimoz)	Belimumab (Benlysta)
Leflunomide	Anakinra (Kineret)	Infliximab (Remicade, Remsima)
Methotrexate	Apremilast (Otezia)	Rituximab (Mabthera, Truxima,) <i>(within the last 12 months)</i>
Mycophenolate	Baricitinib (Olumiant)	Tocilizumab (RoActemra)
Mycophenolic acid (Myfortic)	Canakinumab (Ilaris)	
Sulfasalazine	Certolizumab (Cimzia)	
Tacrolimus (by mouth)	Etanercept (Benepali, Enbrel, Erelzi,)	
	Golimumab (Simponi)	
	Interferon-alfa (Pegasys/Roferon-A)	
	Ixekizumab (Taltz)	
	Sarilumab (Kevzara)	
	Secukinumab (Cosentyx)	
	Tofacitinib (Xeljanz)	
	Tocilizumab (RoActemra)	
	Ustekinumab (Stelara)	

***If you are unsure about whether you have an increased risk, please contact the Rheumatology Helpline on 0121 507 5024 and we can clarify this for you.***

### **SHIELDING ADVICE FOR PEOPLE AT A HIGH RISK OF SEVERE ILLNESS**

**The NHS has identified you, as someone 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 means if you catch the virus, you are more likely to be admitted to hospital than others.

**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.** This is called “shielding” and will protect you by stopping you from coming into contact with the virus.

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/coronavirusextremely-vulnerable](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirusextremely-vulnerable) or call **0800 0288327**, the Government’s dedicated helpline.

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. Your hospital care team will be doing the same. 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.

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](http://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.

### **3. 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, please visit [www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable).

**You should not work outside the home. Your employer may be able to help you work from home if this is appropriate.** 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>.

Yours sincerely,

The SWBH Rheumatology Team

