

Advice for patients and parents about coronavirus COVID19.

Updated 25/03/20

Everyone following the latest updates on the COVID 19 situation will be aware guidance is rapidly changing.

COVID 19 is currently in the headlines and is considered a public health emergency. This understandably can make parents and children worried, particularly if they have problems with their immune systems, are taking medicines which suppress their immune systems, or have other chronic illness. While it is true that worldwide it has already caused severe disease and death, the vast majority of people who catch the virus have a mild flu like illness – and many get no symptoms at all. In particular, children seem to get milder disease than adults, and most of the severe illness has been in older people who are already frail or have other long-standing conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, smoking related lung disease and heart disease.

What is COVID19?

COVID19 is caused by a new strain of a family of viruses called coronavirus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. The most common strains are frequent causes of the common cold. Occasionally new strains of coronavirus arise which cause more serious disease in some people. COVID-19 is caused by one of these new strains.

What are the symptoms of COVID19?

Most people start with symptoms of a cold, particularly cough and fever. Those who are affected more severely can get shortness of breath, or start to breath more quickly.

What is the treatment?

At present there are no treatments which have been shown to make a difference to the disease, although some medicines which have been used for other virus infections are being researched. If children need to come to hospital, the treatment is much the same as other virus infections affecting the lungs, such as giving oxygen and help with feeding and breathing.

How do people catch COVID19?

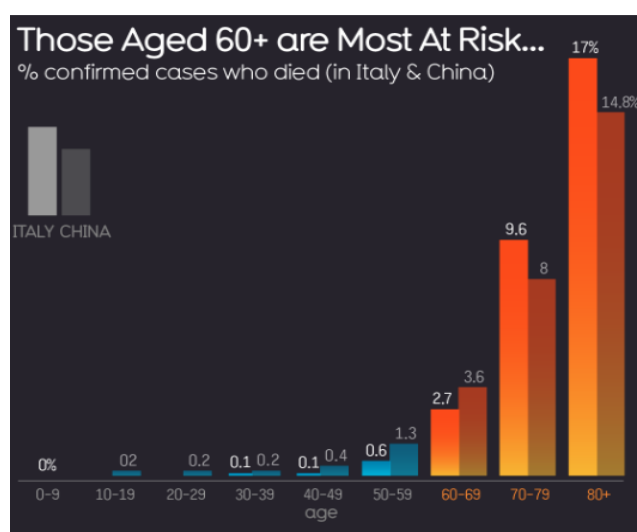
Like the common cold, coronavirus (COVID-19) infection is spread by coughs and sneezes, which produce droplets which other people breath in if they are within 2 meters of a person who is infected. It can also be spread by direct contact, such as touching hands, or something which an infected person has touched or is near them when they cough or sneeze. Touching the face, particularly the mouth or nose, after touching something which has been in contact with the virus allows it to get into the airways and lungs.

Is my child at risk?

We are aware of differences in NHS Scotland and NHS England; in identifying higher risk patient groups, the words being used to describe these groups, how this is being communicated to patient groups & what you/they should be doing. We appreciate and are aware that this may be very confusing and worrying for you.

If you or your child is on medicines that dampen down the immune system we routinely mention that there may be a higher risk of developing an infection. We would like to highlight that so far, from the information that we know from places in the world where there have been a lot of cases, children do not usually seem to get severe disease. So far there have not been any reports of increased risk even in children who have problems with their immune systems, or have other chronic diseases such as asthma, heart disease, cystic fibrosis or type 1 diabetes.

This website gives you more information. <https://what0-18.nhs.uk/popular-topics/coronavirus>. The *talking to children* section on this website gives an informative graph for older children and may be of help for those who are worried about risk. Increased age is by far the biggest factor for those the most at risk of COVID 19.



The British Society of Rheumatology has issued detailed advice for patients with conditions who may, in theory, be more at risk and this guidance has been applied universally to adults children and young people.

They state that being on any of the below medications does mean that your child is immunosuppressed and is in the 'vulnerable' category when reading governmental advice

- methotrexate, mycophenolate mofetil, azathioprine, leflunomide

AND/OR

- any biologic (for examples see at the end the page)

Vulnerable patients have been advised to self isolate or maintain social distance.

They state that being on steroids for a long time or cyclophosphamide then this puts your child into what is classified as an 'extremely vulnerable group'. If your child is on any of the above medications and also has other health problems such as lung, kidney impairment or heart problems this also puts them also into the 'extremely vulnerable' category.

Extremely vulnerable patients have been advised additional measures (shielding) and this has currently been recommended for a period of 12 weeks. For further information about shielding and what that involves [please click here](#).

We have had lots of questions about what this means for other family members. NHS Inform states that the rest of the household aren't required to adopt shielding measures for themselves but should support shielding by following the guidance on [social distancing](#).

*Examples of biologics : rituximab ((in last 12 months), (etanercept (Enbrel/Benepali), adalimumab (Humira/Amgevita), infliximab (inflectra/remsim), golimumab(Simponi), certolizumab (Cimzia)), tocilizumab, abatacept (orencia), belimumab, anakinra, secukinumab, Ixekizumab, Ustekinumab, Canakinumab, Sarilumumab, baricitinib, tofacitinib

What can I do to protect myself and my child against CoVID19?

Please follow current government advice - all children and adults in the UK should stay at home should only go outside for food, health reasons or essential work.

www.gov.uk/coronavirus

You can reduce the risk from all coronaviruses in the same way you can avoid any respiratory infections – with good basic hygiene. The most important part of this is washing your hands regularly. This guide to good hand washing might help:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/>

At present, there is no vaccine available.

I am a parent of a child on immunosuppression should I go to work?

If your work is not essential, please follow [government advice](#) and stay at home.

If you are a key worker, please contact your employer to discuss your individual situation.

Is it safe to come to hospital?

Routine out-patient appointments and operations have been cancelled in hospitals throughout the UK. Anyone with coughs, colds or fever are advised not to come to hospital unless they need urgent care, whether or not they have chronic conditions. Sometimes it might be possible to review you over the telephone rather than bringing you up to hospital, and if so, the team looking after you may contact you to arrange this.

A small number of outpatient appointments will still go ahead where this is felt to be needed. Your local Paediatric Rheumatology team will advise you if this is the case. In addition, patients who remain on treatments given by infusion may still need to come to hospital to receive those infusions. For some patients medications given by infusions may be given by injection using a syringe or pen device instead – your local team are reviewing this currently and will contact you directly to discuss and arrange this if suitable

If you or your child needs to come to hospital, then it is important you come. Staff are well trained in dealing with people who have infections and those who need to be protected from infection, and plans are in place to make the risks of catching COVID while in hospital as small as possible.

What do I do if I or my child is taking medicines which suppress the immune system?

You should continue all usual medicines, as these are helping to keep you or your child healthy. This is the case even if you start to have a cold or flu-like symptoms, or you are taking steroids. However, if you have a high fever, you should contact NHS24 on 111, and hold off medicines (but don't stop steroids) until you get further advice. Within working hours you may also contact your specialist medical team for advice.

New information and advice is being produced all the time, so check with this website

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

Contact your local paediatric rheumatology team if you have further questions specific to your or your own child's care that have not been answered by this advice sheet.