

## Common questions from dermatology patients during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The following information and tables has been adapted from Guys and St Thomas website: <https://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk>

- **I have been referred to the service but I have not heard anything**

We have received your referral but are currently operating a very limited service. Some skin cancer or very urgent patients are being offered telephone consultations in conjunction with photographs. You will remain on our waiting list and we will be in touch with you in due course

- **I am worried that I might have Covid-19/coronavirus**

Please call NHS 111 NI for advice.

- **I am on medication prescribed by your team and I am not sure if I should stop them?**

Do not stop any medication unless specifically told to do so by your clinical team.

- **I am due a review appointment soon and I have not heard from you**

All face to face review clinics have been postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. We are currently performing virtual review clinics where we are phoning patients to check on their current skin condition. The booking office will be in contact to let you know when to expect the telephone call. We are currently only booking 1-2 weeks ahead.

- **I have symptoms that I am worried about**

If the symptoms are related to the condition for which we are seeing you for and you need specific clinical advice from our team please contact us at the Dermatology Department.

Dermatology Department, Northern Trust

Antrim Hospital: 028 94424017

Causeway Hospital: 028 70346040

Whiteabbey Hospital: 028 90552422

Braid Valley Hospital: 028 25635201

Biologics Nurse Specialist: 07557164268

Available 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. If you leave a message, we will return your call.

- **My medication is running out and I need a prescription**

If the medication is usually prescribed by your GP, contact their practice. If we usually prescribe your medication, please contact us.

## **Immunosuppressants and medication**

- **I am on a medicine for my skin problem: what should I do?**

If you are taking a medicine that targets your immune system, COVID 19 may pose a higher risk to you and therefore specific measures are advised.

There are two categories of measures: shielding and very careful social distancing.

### **Shielding for extremely vulnerable people**

Shielding is a measure to protect people who are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) by minimising all face to face interaction between those who are extremely vulnerable and others. Shielding is a step up from very careful social distancing. People advised to shield should not leave their home for 12 weeks (current estimate until late June 2020).

[Read the shielding guidance on the GOV.UK website.](#)

## **Social distancing for vulnerable people**

Asking people to stay at home and avoid contact is a form of social distancing. For people taking drugs that target the immune system, very careful social distancing is advised.

[Read the social distancing guidance on the GOV.UK website.](#)

- **Which category applies to me if I'm on a systemic immunosuppressant (tablet or injection) medicine for my skin condition?**

This depends on the medicine(s) you are taking, your age and what other medical problems you have. You will be advised by your GP or specialist prescribing your drug whether you are an 'extremely vulnerable' person needing to shield.

- **I've received a letter from my GP or my specialist team giving me a risk categorisation which I don't think is correct – how can I check this?**

If you think there may be an error and you do not meet the criteria for the risk level you've been allocated, you can do two things: use Table 2 below to assess your risk and / or contact your GP or specialist team for further discussion and confirmation.

- **I have been told to shield but I am a key worker – what should I do?**

Shielding is for your personal protection and it is strongly advised. You should not feel pressured to continue working if your job means you are coming into contact with people. For some people working from home may be an option, so discuss with your employer.

- **How can I get help if I am shielding?**

If you are in the 'extremely vulnerable' group and are required to 'shield' you will be able to ask for help getting deliveries of essential supplies like food and medicine.

For advice you can phone, email or text message the COVID-19 community helpline

Telephone: 0808 802 0020

Email: [covid19@adviceni.net](mailto:covid19@adviceni.net)

Text: ACTION to 81025.

- **The medicine I am on is not listed in Table 1 – do I need to do anything?**

Unless you also have another medical condition that makes you more vulnerable, you do not need to undertake any more stringent social distancing measures than the general population, provided you are not taking immunosuppressant and biologic medicines. The following medicines are used to treat dermatological conditions but they are not immunosuppressant medicines: hydroxychloroquine, acitretin (Neotigason), alitretinoin (Toctino), isotretinoin, dapsone, chloroquine, 5-ASA medications (e.g. mesalazine), sulphasalazine, antibiotics, topical skin treatments (e.g. steroid creams), inhaled or rectal administered medicines e.g. steroid inhalers.

- **Should I stop my medicine?**

We do not advise you stop your medicine without prior discussion with your specialist doctor. Stopping your treatment could worsen your skin condition resulting in need for hospital treatment.

- **Can I stop my medicine if I want to?**

If you feel strongly that you no longer want to take your prescribed treatment we recommend you discuss this option with your specialist doctor to consider the risk of stopping and discuss alternative treatments options.

- **Self- isolation**

This applies if you have symptoms of coronavirus or live with someone who has symptoms. You may NOT leave the house for 7-14 days.

[Visit the GOV.UK website for stay-at-home guidance.](#)

- **Can I administer my medicine if I am self-isolating because I have symptoms of COVID-19 or a member of my household has symptoms of COVID-19?**

People self-isolating for 2 weeks should not administer any doses of biologics/immunosuppressant during this period until it is clear you are well. The exception to this is if you are taking corticosteroids (prednisolone or hydrocortisone tablets) as this should not be stopped abruptly. If you are worried that you might have Covid-19/coronavirus please call NHS 111 NI for advice.

- **Can I/my family get tested for COVID-19 as I am on an immunosuppressant?**

People are currently only being tested for COVID-19 if they require hospital treatment.

- **What should I do about my scheduled hospital appointment?**

All our review patients are being offered telephone reviews. The booking office will contact you when your review is due and will let you know when to expect the call. Review and frequency of routine blood tests may become less often during this time but we have made arrangements for easy access to bloods tests in our department.

- **How will I get my drug?**

Patients on biologics will continue to receive their biologics via homecare delivery companies. We are not aware of any current stock or delivery issues.

**Table 1: Immunosuppressant and biologic medicines prescribed for people with dermatological conditions.**

<b><i>Immunosuppressive medicines / Small molecule immunosuppressive (tablets or injection)</i></b>	<b><i>Brand names</i></b>	<b><i>Biologic medicines</i></b>	<b><i>Brand names</i></b>
Methotrexate*		Etanercept	Enbrel, Benepali, Erelzi
Azathioprine*		Adalimumab	Humira, Amgevita, Hulio, Hyrimoz, Imraldi
Mycophenolate mofetil or mycophenolic acid*		Infliximab	Remicade, Remsima, Flixabi, Inflectra, Zessly

Ciclosporin*	
Fumaric acid esters	Skilarence, Fumaderm
Hydroxycarbamide*	
6 mercaptourine*	
Leflunomide*	
Cyclophosphamide*	
Tacrolimus* (tablet only, not ointment)	
Sirolimus	Rapamune
Apremilast	Otezla
Baricitinib	Olumiant
Tofacitinib	Xeljanz
Thalidomide	

Golimumab	Simponi
Certolizumab	Cimzia
Secukinumab	Cosentyx
Ixekizumab	Taltz
Brodalumab	Kyntheum
Ustekinumab	Stelara
Guselkumab	Tremfya
Tildrakizumab	Illumetri
Risankizumab	Skyrizi
Rituximab (in last 12 months)	Mabthera, Truxima, Rixathon
Belimumab	Benlysta
Sarilumab	Kevzara
Tocilizumab	RoActemra
Abatacept	Orencia
Canakinumab	Ilaris

		Anakinra	Kineret
		Dupilumab	Dupixent

\* For these medicines there are multiple branded and generic products available.

## More information about my risk from COVID-19 and my medicines

### Very careful social distancing for vulnerable people (moderate risk)

If you have no other significant medical problem and are taking:

- only one immunosuppressive or biologic medicine or
- a biologic combined with methotrexate, hydroxychloroquine or sulphasalazine

you will fall into the category of moderate risk and should take social distancing measures very carefully.

### Shielding for extremely vulnerable people (high risk)

Some people with dermatological conditions will be categorised as extremely vulnerable and should adopt the requirements of not leaving home for 12 weeks. People in this category include:

- Dermatology patients who are taking two or more immunosuppressive or biologic medicines for their condition (except the combination of a biologic with methotrexate, hydroxychloroquine or sulphasalazine)
- People on a systemic corticosteroid (called prednisolone if taken orally) of 20mgs or more each day for more than 4 weeks
- People who take a corticosteroid dose of more than 5mg (or prednisolone equivalent e.g. hydrocortisone tablets) each day for more than 4 weeks plus at least one other immunosuppressive or biologic medication
- People who take cyclophosphamide (not to be confused with ciclosporin, which is a different medicine), rituximab or infliximab for their skin condition

- Also people on a single immunosuppressive or biologic medicine (or a biologic combined with methotrexate, Hydroxychloroquine or sulphasalazine) who are over the age of 70, or are pregnant or have another medical problem

You will be advised by your dermatology team / GP if you fit into this category

**Table 2: Self-assessment Risk Calculator**

Questions	If answer 'yes', note the score
Have you had cyclophosphamide tablets and/or infusions in the last six months?	3
Have you been taking prednisolone 20mg (or more) daily for more than four weeks?	3
Have you received rituximab (in the last 12 months)?	3
Do you receive infliximab infusions?	3
Do you take prednisolone 5mg (or more) daily as well as one or more immunosuppressive or biologic medication?	3
Do you have any of the following problems: lung disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, kidney or liver disease, chronic neurological conditions, diabetes, are very overweight or any other medical condition requiring specialist treatment  or even if you do not have any of these problems, are you over 70 years old?  or you are pregnant	1
Are you on just one immunosuppressive or biologic medicine?	2
Are you on two or more immunosuppressive or biologic medicines (other than sulfasalazine or hydroxychloroquine OR a combination of a biologic with methotrexate)?	3

Add up the numbers above, to make your total:	
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- If you score of 3 or more: you are 'extremely vulnerable' and probably need to shield yourself
- If you score 2: you are unlikely to need to shield yourself. You should practice very careful social distancing. If you are unsure whether you fall in this category, you can contact your dermatology department.
- Score of 0 or 1: the treatments taken for your skin condition alone will not increase your COVID-19 risk. Please follow the [GOV.UK](#) advice given to the general public. If, however, you have concerns about other medical conditions, seek advice from your GP or other specialist.