

Rheumatology Service

27th March 2020**IMPORTANT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU SAFE FROM CORONAVIRUS**

If you have an autoimmune rheumatic condition and/or are taking immune suppressing treatments you will be receiving a letter as advised by the Department of Health with full advice regarding protecting yourself during the coronavirus pandemic.

Full information on isolating, shielding, and social distancing can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

For your safety please ensure you follow any of this advice that is relevant to you.

The situation with regard to Coronavirus is rapidly evolving. To keep up to date there are a number of websites you can visit which include:

Public health agency <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19>

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

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

RHEUMATOLOGY IMMUNE SUPPRESSING MEDICATIONS**DMARDS**

Methotrexate including Methotrexate injections, Azathioprine (Imuran), Leflunomide (Arava) mycophenolate (Cellcept), Apremilast (Otezla)

Sulfasalazine and Hydroxychloroquine have been classed as not being immunosuppressive

BIOLOGICS

Etanercept (Enbrel, Benepali), Adalimumab(Humira, Imraldi, Amgevita) Infliximab, Golimumab (Simponi), Certolizumab (Cimzia), Tocilizumab (RoActemra), Abatacept (Orencia), Belimumab (Benlysta), Anakinra (Kineret), Secukinumab (Cosentyx), Ixekizumab (Taltz), Ustekinumab (Stelara) ,Baracitinib (Olumiant), Tofacitinib (Xeljanz) Sarilumab (Kevzara), Rituximab (Mabthera)

Steroids (eg prednisolone tablets)

You should continue to take your rheumatology medications unless you have been advised otherwise OR if you develop symptoms of coronavirus or ANY infection.

If you have symptoms of infection including a temperature (above 37.8°C) or cough then seek advice through the public health authority website www.publichealth.hscni.net or <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19/> , (or if no internet access telephone 111 or call your GP). It is important to advise any healthcare professional what arthritis treatment you are taking.

If you feel unwell do not take your rheumatology (immune suppressing) medication (you can however take sulfasalazine and hydroxychloroquine). Do not return to taking your treatment until all of the symptoms have resolved and you are well. If in doubt seek advice.

BUT It is important that you do not stop your steroid tablets (Prednisolone) abruptly.

Planned hospital appointments

It is very unlikely that you will be offered a face-to-face Rheumatology clinic appointment at this time. Do not come to a hospital appointment unless you have been specifically told to do so.

You will receive a telephone call from your Rheumatology doctor or nurse specialist instead. This telephone call will be from a withheld number and will be during a specified time slot (e.g between 9am and 12noon) . Please answer the phone if there is no caller ID as it may be the hospital.

Blood monitoring

Many GP practices are not going to be able to continue monitoring blood tests during this period, and for most people there is a greater risk from attending your practice for a routine blood check than just continuing with the medication.

It therefore makes sense to relax the rules for blood checks for some people who usually have normal or stable blood tests. At present if you have been on the disease modifying medication e.g. methotrexate, sulfasalazine, leflunomide, mycophenolate for over 6 months, without a recent change in the dose, blood monitoring can be extended to 6 monthly rather than 3 monthly as long as blood tests have been stable. There may be alternative arrangements for blood tests if they are not stable. Blood monitoring schedules will go back to normal when the current restrictions are lifted.

If you are only on a biologic drug and need blood tests you will be offered an appointment at a bloods clinic. You will be notified of this by telephone.

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

External links for rheumatology patients regarding coronavirus

Explaining coronavirus risks for rheumatology patients

<https://pro.ispringcloud.eu/acc/RiT9s6lxMDM0MDM/s/103403-UPHRE-Gpgqa-XA8eX>

Live well with pain

<https://my.livewellwithpain.co.uk/links/coronavirus-links/>

Information relevant for anyone who is isolating whether or not they have pain at the minute

Versus Arthritis

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/news/2020/march/coronavirus-covid-19-what-is-it-and-where-to-go-for-information/>

<https://www.versusarthritis.org/in-your-area/northern-ireland/>

British Society for Rheumatology <https://www.rheumatology.org.uk/>

National rheumatoid arthritis society - <https://www.nras.org.uk>

Polymyalgia Rheumatica and Giant Cell Arteritis (Temporal Arteritis)

<http://www.pmrqca.co.uk/>

Scleroderma Raynauds UK <https://www.sruk.co.uk/>

Vasculitis UK <https://www.vasculitis.org.uk/>

Tips on how to exercise in your home <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/>

Also look online for virtual exercise classes, Pilates, yoga etc

#STAYSAFESTAYHOME

Please keep up to date with the websites for any change in advice.

Yours sincerely

NHSCT Rheumatology Team