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Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Important advice for people with chronic pain

This leaflet provides you and your family with information about how coronavirus (COVID-19) might affect you if you have chronic pain.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are a new continuous cough, loss of sense of smell or taste and/or a fever/high temperature (37.8C or greater).

A new continuous cough is where you:

- have a new cough that's lasted for an hour
- have had 3 or more episodes of coughing in 24 hours
- are coughing more than usual

A high temperature is feeling hot to the touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature). You may feel warm, cold or shivery. Some people will have more serious symptoms, including difficulty breathing or pneumonia, which might require admission to hospital.

Your safety is our priority and we aim to minimise disruption to hospital services where possible. With that in mind we have listed some important information below. This includes answers to questions you may have and directions to services that can offer advice and support.

Some groups of people are considered to be clinically at high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19). If you are in this group you will have received a letter from NHS Scotland or been contacted by your doctor. If you are in this group you should be following shielding advice which is to strictly follow physical distancing and hygiene measures. More information can be found here:

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

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-shielding/pages/overview/>

If you have chronic pain AND have been asked to shield you will find guidance for your situation elsewhere on this webpage

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-tailored-advice-for-those-who-live-with-specific-medical-conditions/>

Where can I get support?

The NHS Inform Scotland website has up-to-date information and answers to frequently asked questions about COVID-19. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19> and Chronic Pain generally <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/brain-nerve-and-spinal-cord/chronic-pain>.

For general information and any concerns about coronavirus (COVID-19) you can call 0800 028 2816 (COVID-19 helpline).

If you are the parent or carer of a child or young person with this condition you will be particularly anxious about what you should and can do to help and protect them at this time. Alongside the clinical advice provided in this leaflet there is further advice available on Parent Club on how to support your child at this difficult time. <https://www.parentclub.scot/topics/health/coronavirus>.

For **other non-emergency health concerns**, your first point of contact should still be your GP or 111. They are likely to assess you over the telephone or via video link rather than in person to reduce the risk of infection from COVID-19.

You should ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services to arrange deliveries of food and medicines where possible if you are not able or advised to not leave your home.

A national helpline has been set up to provide essential assistance to those who don't have a network of support

If you are unable to access the food and essentials you need, or if you cannot afford to buy them, please phone the national helpline on 0800 111 4000, or contact via textphone on 0800 111 4114. The helpline is open office hours Monday to Friday and will connect you to your local authority who can help provide support or signpost on to other organisations to help you. Further information on the range of support available can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

If you receive support from health and social care organisations, such as care support through your local authority, this will continue as normal. Your health or social care provider will be asked to take additional precautions to make sure that you're protected.

Will my treatment change?

The NHS in Scotland is currently dealing with an unprecedented health situation that has meant that some services have had to be postponed to ensure other, seriously ill patients can be treated and cared for. In these circumstances, NHS Boards are expected to reschedule services or advise of alternative arrangements as soon as clinically appropriate.

Your treatment plan is individual to you. You should not change this or your medication unless told to by your hospital pain service or your GP. If you usually receive steroid injections, these appointments will likely have been cancelled. You may wish to be aware of guidance issued by the Faculty of Pain Medicine that highlights the risks to people of receiving steroid procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://fpm.ac.uk/sites/fpm/files/documents/2020-03/FPM-COVID-19-Steroid-Statement-2020-v2.pdf>. These injections are delivered in hospitals (and not community settings) by specifically trained staff in pain management techniques, which ensures sterile protocols can be followed with support of other teams such as radiography for x-ray guidance. Wider medical staff are also on hand if required in case of adverse reactions or events. Your clinician or GP will discuss alterations to your treatment plan while access to steroid injections are unavailable.

Lidocaine infusions – again your appointment will likely have been cancelled. This procedure is normally done as a day case in hospital and is a high risk treatment, with potentially dangerous side effects. It can only be given under specialist advice with, and access to a pain specialist, by people with experience of monitoring for side effects and taking appropriate action should they arise. It is therefore not safe or appropriate for other healthcare professionals to give these infusions, or for these to currently be done in community settings or at home.

There is currently no strong evidence that ibuprofen can make coronavirus (COVID-19) worse. Until there is more known about this, take paracetamol to treat the symptoms of coronavirus unless your GP or another healthcare professional has told you paracetamol is not suitable for you. If you are already taking ibuprofen or another non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) on the advice of your GP or another healthcare professional, do not stop taking it without checking with them first.

Should I still go to hospital appointments?

If you are receiving treatment for chronic pain, it is important that you take extra care of your overall wellbeing, and attending hospital appointments in a different way is part of this.

Your clinical team will try to minimise the time you spend in hospital departments, for example arranging telephone or Near Me video consultations and offering blood tests at a different NHS site. Make sure your care provider has your up-to-date contact details.

Your specialist or one of their team may contact you to change your appointment. If you have not been contacted, please assume that the appointment is to go ahead as arranged.

Anyone who feels that their condition is deteriorating and they need to be seen sooner than their scheduled appointment should contact their GP or clinician who will be able to provide further advice.

Additionally, if you are unwell and require urgent care which is not COVID-19 related you should still access the care you need. This includes presenting to A&E if

required, and calling your GP or hospital clinician for further advice on your condition.

If you require immediate medical attention such as if you have acute chest pain or sudden breathlessness and you need immediate medical attention call 999.

If you have symptoms of possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection then do not come to the hospital. Instead you should check your symptoms against the information on NHS Inform <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19> and call 111 to seek further advice.

Please tell the call handler about your chronic pain condition. Please also inform your pain team.

Can I have visitors in hospital?

Information about visiting loved ones in hospital can be found [here](#).

I have not received a letter from the NHS, but I am currently being treated for chronic pain, do I need to do anything differently to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Everyone should be following physical distancing measures to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. From the 1 August shielding has been paused. Most people who were shielding can now follow the [advice for the general population](#), however, you should strictly follow [physical distancing and hygiene measures](#). You may also want to think about the levels of risk associated with work and daily activities.

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

If you did not receive a letter, you may still be considered at a higher risk than the general population so it's important you are careful in trying to reduce the risk of becoming infected with coronavirus (COVID-19). You should follow the most up to date guidance on physical distancing, which will protect you and others from picking up the virus:

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

How can self-management techniques help me with my chronic pain?

The term self-management is often misunderstood to mean doing it all yourself. You are the expert in living day to day with your pain but there are various forms of support and techniques that can help you define your goals.

Self-management can improve quality of life and lead to improved function. It should be the foundation to living better. Self-management strategies such as learning about pain; understanding how best to manage activity without increasing pain;

having a flare up plan and managing the emotional impact of living with a chronic pain condition, can support you to live as well as you can with a long term health condition.

While services are not able to provide face-to-face support to individuals, they are promoting accessible digital tools that can assist with self-management. These techniques might build on past skills you have used in other situations but you can tailor them to your current needs, goals and physical and emotional starting point.

Where can I find support to self-manage my chronic pain?

During challenging and uncertain times such as these it can be difficult to keep on track with your self-management strategies, which help you manage your chronic pain condition.

It may be that your pain management appointments, support groups and leisure and community services have been cancelled due to the health and social care service changes as a result of COVID-19.

Many NHS Board pain management services have their own websites that host a variety of patient videos, leaflets, mindfulness audio, tai chi videos and more.

NHS Ayrshire and Arran <https://www.nhsaaa.net/pain-management-service/>

NHS Lanarkshire <https://www.nhslanarkshire.scot.nhs.uk/services/chronic-pain/>

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde <https://www.paindata.org/>

NHS Lothian [https://services.nhsllothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-\(AAH\).aspx](https://services.nhsllothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-(AAH).aspx)

NHS Fife

<https://www.nhsfife.org/nhs/index.cfm?fuseaction=nhs.servicedisplay&p2sid=9503FC99-5056-8C6F-C04C4C5EFF26B37A&themeid=3B984BF2-65BF-00F7-D42941481355468F>

NHS Forth Valley <https://nhsforthvalley.com/health-services/az-of-services/self-management/>

NHS Tayside <https://www.nhstayside.scot.nhs.uk/OurServicesA-Z/PainService/index.htm>

There are also a range of organisations that support people with pain by providing resources to empower individuals to self-manage their long term pain condition.

Pain Concern www.painconcern.org.uk

Offers a range of resources, including an email helpline (help@painconcern.org.uk).

Pain Association <https://painassociation.co.uk/>

Alternatives to face-to-face groups are offered online. Additional resources and free downloads are also available.

Versus Arthritis: <https://www.versusarthritis.org/> - telephone helpline Monday to Friday between 9am-8pm, 0800 5200 520. You can also access around the clock support 24 hours a day 7 days a week by using the arthritis virtual assistant - <https://www.versusarthritis.org/get-help/arthritis-virtual-assistant/>.

The Pain Toolkit: www.paintoolkit.org

Tame the Beast: www.tamethebeast.org

Live Well with Pain: <https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/>

ALISS (A local Information System for Scotland) <https://www.aliss.org/>

Action on Pain: <http://www.action-on-pain.co.uk>

Offer support and advice including a telephone (0345 6031593) and e-mail helpline (painline@action-on-pain.co.uk).

Affa Sair: <https://www.affasair.org/> - chronic pain support group in North East Scotland (NHS Grampian)

Email - affasair@gmail.com

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/affasair>

AHP Living well in isolation guidance:

https://ahpscot.wordpress.com/2020/04/04/living-well-in-isolation/amp/?_twitter_impression=true

Scottish National Pain Management Programme: <https://www.snrpmp.scot.nhs.uk/>

British Pain Society: www.britishpainsociety.org/people-with-pain/

What exercises can I do to keep active?

Keeping active is important for health and wellbeing and the management of chronic pain.

You are allowed to leave your home to exercise twice a day alone or with members of your household, <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>. You should stay at home if you are shielding (classed at the highest risk of severe illness from Coronavirus (COVID-19) or self-isolating (because you or someone in your household has symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19).

A gentle pacing approach when starting exercise is encouraged to build up your confidence and manage your pain whilst exercising.

There are many online resources for different types of exercise, however, walking, doing hobbies and day to day activities are also valuable ways to keep active.

The Physiotherapy Pain Association has created a list of resources, including videos to gently exercise including chair yoga, tai chi, strength and balance.

<https://ppa.csp.org.uk/content/keeping-active>

The NHS website also has a range of instructor led videos including aerobic exercise, strength, yoga and Pilates. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/?fbclid=IwAR0Gzib-aPSrmn5iSGwEdmXJV8wSNXrpNWHNOyTSI444I6wIODGEDbQBHac>

NHS Lothian Pain Physiotherapy services also has excellent videos for guided exercises. [https://services.nhsllothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-\(AAH\).aspx](https://services.nhsllothian.scot/painmanagement/Pages/Pain-Management-Programme-(AAH).aspx)

How can I maintain positive mental health?

There are simple things you can do that may help you maintain positive mental health. These include:

- Exercising regularly
- Spending time doing things you enjoy – this might include reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to/watching favourite radio or TV programmes
- Eating healthy, well-balanced meals
- Drinking enough water
- Trying to avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs
- Keeping your windows open to let in fresh air
- Arranging a space to sit with a nice view, if possible
- Getting some natural sunlight if you can or sit on your front step, staying more than 2 metres away from others

You can get support in dealing with anxiety about coronavirus (COVID-19) at:

- <https://clearyourhead.scot/>
- <https://breathingspace.scot/>
- <https://www.samh.org.uk/>
- <https://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk/>

If you are self-isolating and experiencing much higher levels of distress than is normal for you and you are struggling to cope with day-to-day things this might be useful:

<https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/28084/coronavirus-covid-19/psychosocial-support-and-wellbeing/tips-on-how-to-cope-if-you-are-worried-about-coronavirus-and-in-isolation>

NHS Inform has further resources to help your mental wellbeing:

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

Where else can I find further support to help me with chronic pain?

There are also a wide range of mobile apps that support meditation, mindfulness and movement. These include:

- Headspace: guided meditations, animations, articles and videos (free basic pack) <https://www.headspace.com/>

- Calm: guided meditation, sleep, breathing and relaxation (free trial period) <https://www.calm.com/>
- Breathe: an emotional wellness and meditation app (free trial period) <https://breatheapp.uk/>
- Mindfulness North West: free resources to learn about mindfulness <https://mindfulnessnorthwest.co.uk/>
- My Cuppa Jo: Making sense of pain through science and stories, bridging the gap between patients and health professionals <http://www.mycuppajo.com/>

What should I do to collect my routine medications?

You could ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services.

A national helpline has been set up to provide essential assistance to those who don't have a network of support

If you are unable to access the food and essentials you need, or if you cannot afford to buy them, please phone the national helpline on 0800 111 4000, or contact via textphone on 0800 111 4114. The helpline is open office hours Monday to Friday and will connect you to your local authority who can help provide support or signpost on to other organisations to help you. Further information on the range of support available can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

If you receive support from health and social care organisations, such as care support through your local authority, this will continue as normal. Your health or social care provider will be asked to take additional precautions to make sure that you're protected.

What should I do if I am a carer for someone with chronic pain?

If you're caring for someone who's vulnerable, there are some simple steps that you can take to protect them from becoming infected with coronavirus (COVID-19). You should follow advice on good hygiene, such as:

- Wash your hands on arrival and often - use soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands
- Don't visit if you're unwell and make alternative arrangements for their care
- Provide them information on who they should call if they feel unwell (their GP phone number and 111) and how to use NHS inform
- Access advice on creating a contingency plan from Carers UK
- Find out about different sources of support that could be used

- Look after your own well-being and physical health

Advice for unpaid carers is available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-unpaid-carers/>

Are my carers, and/ or friends and family still allowed to visit my home?

The current guidance on meeting up with others is [here](#).

If you have a carer or visitor who supports you with essential everyday tasks, they can come to your home. We do advise that upon arrival, and often throughout their visit, they wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.

It's 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, your local council should be able to help you or please visit <https://careinfoscotland.scot/topics/how-to-get-care-services>.

Update for those not shielding

You can keep up to date with any changes [here](#).

It's important to remember however, that those over the age of 70 without an underlying health condition and under the age of 70 who receive the flu jab for medical reasons are still classed as being at an increased risk from severe illness from COVID-19 and should be particularly careful in following physical distancing measures along with hand washing and cough hygiene.