

Updated 6 Nov 2020

Healthcare Quality and Improvement Directorate

Planning and Quality Division



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

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

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

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are a new continuous cough loss of sense of smell or taste and/or a fever/high temperature (37.8 °C 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 don't need to measure your temperature). You may feel warm, cold or shivery.

Some people will have more serious symptoms, including pneumonia or difficulty breathing, which might require admission to hospital.

Your safety is our priority and we aim to minimise disruption to hospital services where possible. The NHS will continue to provide emergency and urgent care for all patients. With that in mind we have listed some important information below. This advice includes answers to questions you may have and details on 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 will have been contacted by your doctor. If you are in this group you should currently be following advice for those shielding:

<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/>

What should I know about coronavirus (COVID-19) and diabetes?

Although the main target of the virus is the lungs, some people with diabetes are more at risk of becoming ill if they contract the coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

Published 6 Nov 2020

If you have coronavirus (COVID-19), then like most infections, this may cause your body to mount a stress response to fight the infection. This in turn may cause your diabetes to become unstable and your sugars are likely to run high.

Will my symptoms be different because I have diabetes and what should I look out for?

The symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) will be the same as the general population but diabetes symptoms could become worse.

If this happens you will need to speak to your GP or diabetes care team. They will be able to advise or seek advice from appropriate medical professionals.

Where can I call for support?

If you have concerns about your condition or your treatment you should contact your GP or diabetes care team.

The NHS Inform Scotland website has up-to-date information and answers to frequently asked questions.

www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

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/>.

More specific up to date information on diabetes and coronavirus (COVID-19) can be found on the Diabetes UK website at: www.diabetes.org.uk/coronavirus

You can contact the Diabetes UK Helpline on 0141 212 8710 or email helpline@diabetes.org.uk

You can contact Diabetes UK online forum if you'd like to chat with other people affected by diabetes

https://www.diabetes.org.uk/how_we_help/community/diabetes-support-forum

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.

Published 6 Nov 2020

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

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 by video link rather than in person to reduce the risk of infection from coronavirus (COVID-19).

Will my treatment change?

Your treatment plan is individual to you and should not be changed without advice from your medical professional. The treatment you are on for your diabetes will not change if you remain well.

If you become unwell then you should follow your diabetes care plan on 'sick day rules'. Sick day guidance will vary depending on your type of diabetes and the treatment you are on. If you are unsure of 'sick day rule' guidance you should contact your care team for further advice.

If you routinely check your blood sugar at home you should do it more often.

If you have type 1 diabetes you should check your blood sugar at least every four hours including during the night.

You should also check your ketones if your blood sugar level is high (generally 15mmol/l or more however you may have specific individual guidance) or if you feel unwell. If ketones are present follow your 'sick day' rule guidance and if necessary contact your diabetes team or out of hours services.

If you don't check your blood sugar levels at home, please be aware of the signs of a hyper (hyperglycaemia). Signs can include passing more urine than normal (especially at night), being very thirsty, headaches, tiredness and lethargy. You should seek help if you have hyper symptoms.

Should I still go to hospital appointments?

If you are receiving treatment for diabetes, it is important that you take extra care of your overall wellbeing. The majority of routine face-to-face diabetes clinic appointments have been suspended however, if you are having any problems with your diabetes your care team will still be able to offer support.

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. Diabetes pregnancy and foot services will still continue although some of your appointments are likely to be via telephone or Near Me video consultations. 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.

Published 6 Nov 2020

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 diabetes. Please also inform your diabetes care team.

Can I have visitors in hospital?

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

If hospital admission is likely please remember to pack your mobile phone and phone charger so you can keep in touch with relatives and friends.

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

If you have not received a letter from NHS Scotland but believe you fall within the highest risk group you are advised to follow the advice for those shielding set out on the NHS Inform website and contact your GP or clinician for advice.

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

If you have not received a letter and **do not believe** you are in the highest risk group, you do not need to follow the shielding advice but you should still be particularly 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>

Published 6 Nov 2020

If you develop symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) your household should follow the instructions to self-isolate:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-infection>

Who should I contact if I become unwell or develop side effects while on my current medicines?

If you have acute chest pain or sudden breathlessness and you need immediate medical attention call 999. If you feel that your diabetes symptoms are worsening contact your diabetes care team or GP.

If you think you may have coronavirus (COVID-19) developed a new continuous cough, a fever/high temperature and/or a loss of sense of taste or smell, do not go to your GP, pharmacy or hospital.

You should phone 111 if:

- your symptoms worsen,
- breathlessness develops or worsens,
- your symptoms haven't improved in 7 days

Tell the call handler about your diabetes.

If you have a medical emergency, phone 999 and tell them you have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms.

What should I do to collect my routine medications?

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

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.

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

Published 6 Nov 2020

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>

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

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can have serious effects on anyone who has a long-term health condition or a weakened immune system, including some people with diabetes.

If you're caring for someone who's vulnerable, there are some simple steps that you can take to protect them. 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

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

Published 6 Nov 2020

- 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>

Update for those who have not been asked to shield

You can keep up to date with any changes here:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/>

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.