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Healthcare Quality and Improvement Directorate
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Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Important advice for people with Chronic Heart Disease

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

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are a new continuous cough, loss of sense of smell or taste and/or a 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/>

If you have heart disease AND have been asked to shield you will find guidance for your situation on this page:

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

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What should I know about coronavirus (COVID-19) and chronic heart disease?

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

The heart has to work harder during the illness so this could affect patients who already have problems with weakened heart muscle (chronic heart failure).

For patients with chronic heart failure, more comprehensive information is available on the Scottish Heart Failure Hub website:

www.heartfailurehubscotland.co.uk/covid-19/

The virus also may pose a risk for people who have the fatty build-up known as plaque in their arteries (coronary artery disease). Similar viral illnesses can affect these plaques which can, in some cases worsen chest pain (angina) symptoms or increase the risk of having a heart attack.

Some patients with chronic heart disease may also have a weakening of the immune system. For those with a specific inherited cardiac condition, for example, a cardiomyopathy or Long QT Syndrome, more relevant information is available on the Scottish National Inherited Cardiac Conditions website: www.niccs.scot.nhs.uk/

Will my symptoms be different because I have a chronic heart condition and what should I look out for?

The symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) will be the same as the general population but heart failure symptoms (fluid retention or breathlessness) or chest pain (angina) may become worse.

If this happens you will need to speak to your GP or local Heart Failure Liaison Nurse, if you have one. They will be able to advise or seek advice from appropriate medical professionals.

Where can I get support?

If you have concerns about your condition or your treatment you should contact your GP, Heart Failure Liaison Nurse or Cardiac Rehabilitation team.

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

www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

A national helpline is available 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 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday and will connect you to your local authority who can help

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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/>.

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland's nationwide network of Kindness Volunteers can provide support during the pandemic including practical help with shopping or just keeping in regular touch to check on your wellbeing; see www.chss.org.uk/kindness

You can contact the British Heart Foundation Helpline on 0300 330 3311, email hearthelpline@bhf.org.uk or visit their website for further information and support: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/>.

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 I get the Coronavirus vaccination?

Your local NHS health board or GP will invite you for your coronavirus vaccine soon (or will already have done so) if you are in one of these groups:

- residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
- people aged 80 and over
- frontline health and social care workers

After these groups have been invited for their vaccine, further groups at higher risk from coronavirus will be invited. You will be offered an appointment as soon as it's possible for you to get the vaccine. Please do not contact your GP about the Coronavirus (Covid-19) vaccine beforehand. To find out more visit www.nhsinform.scot/covid19vaccine or call the Scottish COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline on 0800 030 8013 (open daily, 8am to 8pm).

What do I need to know about the vaccine?

- The coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine does not cause a coronavirus infection. It helps to build up your immunity to the virus, so your body will fight it off more easily if it affects you.
- This can reduce your risk of developing coronavirus and make your symptoms milder if you do get it.
- The coronavirus vaccine is suitable for people with disorders of the immune system.
- The effectiveness and immune response of the vaccine is being monitored as the vaccine is rolled out.

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How are the vaccines given?

The coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine will be given in 2 doses. It offers good protection within 2 to 3 weeks of the first dose.

The latest evidence suggests the first dose of the vaccine provides protection for most people for up to 12 weeks. As a result of this evidence, when you can have the second dose has changed. This is also to make sure as many people can have the vaccine as possible.

Will my treatment change?

Your treatment plan is individual to you and should not be changed without advice from your medical professional.

There has been some adverse publicity regarding ACE inhibitors and susceptibility to Coronavirus (COVID-19). There is no evidence to support this and it is dangerous to stop important therapy for heart disease.

If you are being treated with ACE inhibitors (drug names ending in –pril such as Ramipril) or AR blockers (drug names ending in –sartan such as Candesartan) or sacubitril/valsartan (Entresto), do not stop these unless told to by your medical professional.

Individual decisions based on the benefits and risks of your treatment may have to be made with you. Alternative therapy options involving fewer visits to hospital may be offered to you. For example, if you are taking warfarin, this may be changed to a new blood thinning medication to avoid the need for international normalised ratio (INR) checks. If you have a mechanical heart valve, you will have to stay on warfarin but the new blood thinning medication can be used if you have a tissue heart valve or valve repair.

Should I still go to hospital appointments?

If you are receiving treatment for a chronic heart condition, 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.

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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 the symptoms of a 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 heart condition. Please also inform your heart disease clinical team.

Can people visit me 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 did not receive a letter from the NHS around shielding, but I am currently being treated for chronic heart disease, do I need to do anything differently to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

If you did not receive a letter from NHS Scotland regarding shielding but believe you fall within the highest risk group you should follow the shielding advice 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>.

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>

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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 heart disease symptoms are worsening contact your GP or specialist cardiac nurse, if you have one.

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 heart condition.

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 to arrange deliveries of food and medicines where possible if you are not able or advised not to leave your home.

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 9am – 5pm, 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?

On 5 January 2021 Scotland was placed into lockdown measures due to faster spreading variant of the Covid-19 virus. The current guidance on meeting up with others is [here](#) and you can find up to date information on support for people affected by coronavirus (Covid-19) [here](#).

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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 chronic heart disease?

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 chronic heart disease.

If you're caring for someone who's at increased risk, 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 with 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

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- 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 to advice 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.