

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

SECTION 1 – Corona Virus advice

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SECTION 1

What is Corona virus (CoVID-19)?

This is a new and serious viral infection which has spread around the world. It is highly contagious and carries significant risk to our health.

Please follow the most up to date guidelines from the government here:

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

I am worried that I might have coronavirus, what should I do?

Use the NHS 111 online coronavirus symptom checker in the first instance at:

<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

It will direct you as to whether self-care at home, seek further medical advice, or whether more urgent assessment or 999 admission to hospital is required.

What is the stay at home guidance? (multi-lingual):

This applies to EVERYONE.

This is to reduce the rate of transmission of the virus and to save lives. Anyone can carry the virus and be infectious while having no symptoms. Although it is widely publicised that people over 70 years old and those with other medical conditions are more at risk, this can affect younger people quite severely too. We have only limited Doctors, Nurses, medical beds and intensive care beds in the NHS and so the more people who are infected, the less we can care for everyone who needs help. This includes the ability to look after those with non-coronavirus illnesses such as heart attacks, strokes and meningitis.

There are only 4 reasons that you should leave your home.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>

What is social distancing?

This is for EVERYONE.

Government advice is to stay at home. If you must go out of the house for unavoidable reasons such as essential shopping or essential work then keep a minimum distance of 2 meters away from non-household contacts.

This is because the air (droplet) based transmission of coronavirus is in the particles we cough and sneeze out. They tend to fall similar to an aerosol spray. If we stand further away from people we are less likely to breathe those particles in. Remember **wash your hands** often, before you eat, and after handling anything which other people may have touched, for about 20 seconds. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth.

What is the advice about “Shielding”?

This is advice for people with serious underlying health conditions who would be at high risk of hospitalisation and potential severe complications of Coronavirus infection.

It involves prolonged self-isolation for 12 weeks, and taking extra precautions to avoid infection. You will receive a letter or email if you are classed as needing to be “shielded.”

Community Hubs to support Shielded patients are currently being set up. We will add the details here when they are finalised.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

What are the current rules around Coronavirus Symptoms and Household self-isolation?

Anyone with symptoms of a new, persistent cough and / or a temperature of 38.4 degrees or above needs to self-isolate for 7 days.

All household contacts of that person will also need to self-isolate for 14 days.

See advice on this here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>

Can I do anything to keep track of my symptoms or help identify when I am getting unwell?

Help scientists by tracking your symptoms here even if you are well: <https://covid.joinzoe.com/>

I am in self-isolation and have been asked to get a note for my employer. How do I get this?

This is not provided by your GP. Please use the website here: <https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>

I feel that I am at high risk, but my employer is insisting I work, what do I do?

Please see Section 4 below.

I am low risk and I would like to help in my community:

Register to volunteer and support your community and the NHS here. All help will be gratefully received, essential to people's lives and will still observe social distancing to minimise any risk to the volunteers.

<https://www.goodsamapp.org/nhsvolunteerresponders>

SECTION 2

When I ring Arden Medical Centre, what has changed in the way my health issue will be dealt with?

You will notice our greeting message on the telephone has changed. Your call will be handled by a receptionist, not necessarily one at your usual site. They will require specific accurate information from you to decide how to best deal with your enquiry. They may then place you on a list for a clinician to phone you or re-direct you to the most suitable service.

To protect everyone, the majority of clinical assessment and decisions are going to be done over the **phone** and by video call when the facility is available.

This is to protect yourselves and the surgery staff from possible exposure to coronavirus.

You will not be able to walk in to the surgery so please telephone about any queries. There will be boxes at the front door to drop in any paperwork or prescription requests. Please write your usual Pharmacist on any requests and your medications will be available to collect **directly** from them within **one week**.

Will I need a face to face appointment?

It is likely your problem / enquiry will be dealt with over the telephone or by video consultation.

If this is not possible you will be spoken to by more than one person to ascertain this. It is vital for everyone's protection that the number of face to face appointments are kept to a minimum at this time.

Arden Medical Centre is working with Dorridge, Balsall Common and Hampton GP Surgeries, as part of Rural PCN and patients will be advised which site they need to attend, should a face to face appointment be appropriate.

If you are seen, then strict infection control measures will be taken. You may be asked to wait in your car until you are due to be seen. This is to ensure the lowest possible risk of transmission of the virus between patients and health care workers at the surgery.

What happens if I think I need a home visit?

We will endeavour to deal with your problem by telephone or video consultation.

We will be asking you about symptoms of both the person the visit request is being made for and anyone else in the house as well (to screen for coronavirus symptoms). This service is extremely limited and will only be available for people who cannot be dealt with remotely, physically cannot leave their house and where there is an urgent and essential need for clinical assessment which requires face to face contact. The visit will involve strict infection control measures.

What happens if I have other infections like a UTI or skin infection that need prompt treatment?

Please contact us and explain this to reception, they will arrange a clinician to call you back. In most cases we will be able to deal with this problem over the phone.

How will I have my review for my long-term condition like Diabetes, COPD and Asthma?

We will be doing all reviews remotely either by phone and/ or video consultation. We will not be bringing patients to the surgery for their reviews. This review is likely to be done by a nurse. As the pandemic progresses we may be unable to carry out these reviews unless you have a new problem or are feeling unwell.

I'm pregnant – what do I need to do?

Please book in via reception with the midwife if you are newly pregnant.

Covid-19 Virus Infection and Pregnancy: We know this is a very worrying time for you. Here is some information for you about how COVID-19 affects pregnant women and what you can do to look after yourself. <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>

What happens if my child needs immunisations?

This is vital work which we are continuing with.

8 week baby checks will happen at the same time as immunisations to minimise visits to the surgery.

Speak with reception to arrange the appointment for your child. Please be aware this might not be at Arden Medical Centre, but at another of the Rural PCN sites. You will be advised of this at the time your face to face appointment is confirmed. We are having to work differently than normal to provide a safe service.

What about if I need a prescription for a contraceptive pill?

You will need a clinician discussion if this is a new prescription or if you are overdue your pill check. This will depend upon which contraceptive you are on and when you last had a full comprehensive review. Any review will be over the telephone. Having an up to date weight (preferably in kg), height and blood pressure reading (if you can) will be very useful.

What about if I am on injectable contraception or have a coil which is due to be changed?

You are likely to need telephone discussion with a clinician as to the most appropriate options. We are following the latest guidance from the Faculty of reproductive and sexual health on this. You may be asked to take an oral contraceptive (progesterone only pill) to cover the time needed until it is safe to carry out procedures again.

What about cervical smears?

We are currently awaiting further clarification on providing routine smears. If you are due your smear test please phone us and you will be added to the waiting list.

What do I do if I am worried about sexual health such as having discharge?

At this time Umbrella sexual health service at Boots are not running a walk-in service. Patients with symptoms are advised to call 0121 237 5700 where they will receive advice from a member of the clinical team. Umbrella will continue to follow their current practice of signposting to Umbrella pharmacies, to help deliver on some services.

Please visit: <https://umbrellahealth.co.uk/service-locator>

What about Prostate cancer injections, or other hormone treatments

We will still be providing this service following strict infection control measures. Telephone reception to book this service.

What about other injections like B12 or joint injections?

Please call reception who will advise you on the current plan to provide these.

I have a dental problem. What should I do?

As during normal circumstances, we do **not** prescribe antibiotics for dental problems. Please contact your dentist who will be providing an emergency service at this time or call 111 and select the option for dental care.

What about referrals to hospital?

The hospitals have stopped accepting all incoming referrals, apart from specific, suspected cancer referrals and certain specific reasons for x-rays. This situation may be subject to change at short notice. Please do not contact us to debate this issue as no exceptions can be made. Understandably the Hospitals are prioritising the much-needed care for the patients requiring admission for severe coronavirus infection.

SECTION 3

What do I do about my prescribed medications?

Arden Medical Centre will issue normal quantities and at normal intervals, to avoid placing unnecessary strain on the medicines supply chain. Please do not place us in the situation of having to decline early orders by only ordering WHAT YOU ACTUALLY NEED and WHEN you need it. We may be able, in some cases, to do repeat dispensing, but this will *still* result in you having normal quantity prescriptions at set intervals.

We will ask EVERYONE who doesn't yet have their prescriptions sent electronically to choose a pharmacy, to enable this service. This is more secure, faster and more reliable than using paper prescriptions, and we must limit social contact to a minimum. Not having to come in to request and pick up prescriptions is a key part of this critical fight against spreading coronavirus. You will be able to collect your medications directly from the pharmacy.

Please note that we will endeavor to process your prescription request within one week. Due to unprecedented demand, your Pharmacists are also under extreme pressure and will also need 4-5 days to dispense your medication. Please bear this in mind when requesting medication.

Someone has mentioned repeat dispensing to me, what is this?

Repeat dispensing is different to having repeat prescriptions. It is an excellent service whereby the Surgery approves your medication for a whole year (or until your next review is due) and sends this straight to your usual Pharmacy. Each month when you require your medication, instead of requesting this through your Surgery, you go straight to your Pharmacy and collect your medicines. You do not need to contact us first. We are gradually moving all suitable repeat medication over to this system.

I need a medication review as I can't order my repeat medication online?

Please free-text your medication request online even if the computer says you are unable to request it. The request will be actioned by a health care worker and if a medication review is necessary a telephone appointment will be booked for you. A blood test may be required depending on which

medication you are on. If your bloods are stable we may be able to defer the blood test for a month or two.

Blood pressure medication :

We will not be checking blood pressures in the surgery. We recommend that for your safety you purchase your own blood pressure machine to monitor your blood pressure at home and provide us with up to date readings if needing a medication review.

What about medications which require blood tests for monitoring?

We will not be able to issue certain higher risk medications without appropriate blood test monitoring. Examples of such medicines are methotrexate and anti-coagulants such as apixiban. This list is not exhaustive. The blood test will be done in a controlled environment with strict infection control measures in place.

What about anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) like naproxen, ibuprofen and diclofenac?

The current guidance is that these medications do not increase your risk of getting COVID-19 infection. There is acceptance, however, that we do not have enough data on the matter so current advice is that you should use only paracetamol for symptoms such as fever/aching if you have, or are suspected to have COVID-19. Those patients current taking NSAIDS for other conditions e.g. arthritis, should not stop them due to COVID19.

The NHS medical director issued this guidance on 17/3/20.

What about ACE-inhibitors or Angiotension receptor blockers for blood pressure? Should I stop these?

No. You should keep taking them. The British Cardiovascular Society and British Society for Heart Failure have jointly announced on 19/3/20 that there is **no evidence** that people have worse health outcomes if they get COVID-19 infection whilst taking these medicines, and should only stop on the advice of the doctor responsible for their care.

What if I have asthma, I have heard I need a “rescue pack” of antibiotics and steroids on social media?

For people with asthma we do NOT recommend having a rescue pack at home. This stance has been agreed by many GPs and respiratory teams around the country and Asthma UK.

If someone’s asthma is bad enough to consider steroids, it is essential that they are assessed by a healthcare professional. If you have a written asthma management plan, follow the advice on this in the first instance.

It is very important that you keep taking your regular inhalers as prescribed at the moment, including taking your daily ‘preventer’ or steroid inhalers. If you have any queries or would like to

discuss this or any aspects of your asthma care further please call reception and book a telephone asthma review appointment with one of our Nurses.

Inhalers will not be issued for patients who are not asthmatic and are well.

Extra inhalers will not be issued unless there is a clinical need.

Specific advice for asthmatics can be found here :

<https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/triggers/coronavirus-covid-19/>

I have COPD. Do I need to do anything different or have a rescue pack just in case?

Please take your usual medication as prescribed. Most people will not need a rescue pack. If you suffer with repeated (more than 2) chest infections that have required antibiotics and steroids in the past 12 months, we can arrange for a respiratory review with one of our specially trained nurses over the phone. Smoking increased your chance of getting a chest infection or worse symptoms so try to quit smoking.

For more information please see <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus/people-living-with-lung-condition>

For tips and links about stopping smoking please see <https://solihull.mylifeportal.co.uk/stopsmoking/>

Can I be prescribed paracetamol?

We are extremely busy dealing with the current pandemic, so please only request a prescription for paracetamol if it is one of your regular repeat medication. Please purchase over the counter at a shop or pharmacy. We have been advised that stocks at these businesses will be replenished regularly.

SECTION 4

I am in self isolation and have been asked to get a note for my employer. How do I get this?

This is not provided by your GP. Please use the website here: <https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/>

What about if I need a fit note (sick note/doctors note) which is not Coronavirus related?

If you require a fit note or sick note for an illness that is not related to Coronavirus then please call reception and we will call you back to discuss. We ask for a little patience as our turnaround time will be longer than usual given the pandemic. If we decide that a note is needed, we will either get these to you by post or preferably will send them to you by email and will discuss this with you when you call. Please be aware that although we understand this is important to you, it is not medically urgent and you will need to let your employers know that there will be a wait.

I feel that I am at high risk, but my employer is insisting I work, what do I do?

Ask your employer for immediate access to their occupational health service. Our local CCG guidance is that **GP practices will no longer be issuing fit notes** (also known as sick notes). The government has made it clear in their guidance on the media and on their website what people should do with regard to self-isolation and work. This advice is [available here](#). There is a specific document on [social distancing and vulnerable people](#), which outlines what people should do if they are in these vulnerable categories.

The government has also made it clear that it is the employer's responsibility to support their employees in implementing this advice to protect the employee and other members of the public. There is [guidance for employers](#) on the same website.

The guidance is clear that **employers should use their discretion in requesting fit notes**. If an employer insists on a fit note during this time of emergency, we would point out that this is distracting frontline health care workers from undertaking their jobs to look after those who are ill. Any such request from the employer must be made in writing, explaining why the government advice is not clear enough for them to use their discretion. A fee may be charged for any response from the practice. Patients can get a "self-declaration" note for periods of isolation ([available here](#)).

SECTION 5

I'm feeling anxious and worried all the time. What can I do to make it better?

We are living in challenging times. Every one of us is facing new situations that can leave us feeling at best unsettled and at worst anxious and upset. It is ok to have these feelings and often they will pass off quickly but it is important to have some resources to hand that you can turn to if they start to feel overwhelming.

Please see a list of useful things to help and resources here (insert link to wellbeing doc also attached)

I'm finding it difficult to sleep well. Is there anything I can try?

It is very common for sleep to be disturbed during stressful and unsettled times and you will not be alone. Please see the website below for useful tips and links.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep/>