

## Introduction to Guidance on COVID-19 and Social Distancing for LTHT Rheumatology patients

**PLEASE READ THIS LETTER BEFORE YOU READ THE ENCLOSED GENERAL  
NHS INFORMATION ON SHIELDING AND SOCIAL DISTANCING ADVICE FOR  
CORONAVIRUS**

Dear Patient,

These letters and documents are being made available to all patients currently under the care of the Rheumatology Department at Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust. The information and guidance contained will not apply to all patients but please read this letter carefully to check if it does apply to you. We may need to contact some patients again in the coming weeks. This information is to help you identify if you are at high risk of serious illness from Coronavirus and should be shielding yourself, if you are at moderate risk and should be using strict social distancing, or if you are at low risk.

To check you understand what we mean by certain terms:

- **Shielding** because you have high risk of serious illness if you get coronavirus is explained in more detail in the accompanying Government letter
- **Strict social distancing** because you have moderate risk means minimising the number of people that you have contact with (only leaving the house for exceptional reasons)
- **Standard social distancing** because you have low risk means following the Government's advice for the general population

This information particularly applies to patients who are taking immunosuppressive drugs and/or steroids (prednisolone) for a rheumatological condition. Please see the list of drugs in the Blue Box on the flow chart.

Our advice to patients who are taking immunosuppressive drugs for their rheumatological condition is **not to stop taking your medication unless directed by a doctor or specialist nurse**. If you have symptoms of possible coronavirus

please see our guidance which is enclosed and also available on the Rheumatology page of Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust Website.

<https://www.leedsth.nhs.uk/a-z-of-services/rheumatology/>

## WHO SHOULD FOLLOW SHIELDING ADVICE AND AVOID CONTACT WITH OTHERS?

Some patients on immunosuppressive drugs are at high risk of becoming infected with coronavirus and suffering serious complications if they are infected. The information in the flow chart tells you how you can check which risk group you are in.

**If our flow chart suggests you are high risk then you must follow the Government's shielding advice. The way to do this is described in the accompanying Government NHS letter.** The letter also explains how you can obtain official assistance if you have no other contacts to help you with essential tasks. This help is only available for those of you who are in this high risk group

If you are not in the high risk group, please follow the guidance on the flow chart, and other information is available on the Government website.

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> for further information.

The flow chart is for guidance and further advice may be appropriate for individual situations. For example, patients who work in occupations where they may be at higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19 would be advised that they should take greater precautions to reduce this risk, including by working from home if necessary.

We appreciate that this is a worrying time for many patients and that there is a lot of information to take in.

We are here to fully support you at this time. Our response times may be slightly longer than usual due to the high numbers of calls we are currently receiving from patients, thank you for your understanding.

## **WE WILL CONVERT ALL YOUR HOSPITAL APPOINTMENTS TO TELEPHONE CONSULTATIONS**

We need to minimise the risk of Covid-19 for our patients. To protect our patients, we have converted **all** non-urgent appointments to telephone consultations. It will work similarly to a normal clinic; the doctor will call you on your registered phone number at the time of your appointment.

We can discuss any needs for prescriptions and monitoring (e.g. bloods) during that conversation. We are planning to move to video consultation at some point so others can be part of the appointment too.

To reduce risk of infection, please do NOT turn up to the rheumatology department in person unless clearly asked to do so.

## **IF YOU HAVE A FLARE OR NEED FURTHER ADVICE ABOUT YOUR RHEUMATOLOGY CONDITION**

Call the Rheumatology advice line on 0113 3924444.

### **Further detailed advice**

#### **YOUR CURRENT MEDICATION**

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We advise that you **CONTINUE TAKING YOUR MEDICATION AS PRESCRIBED**. At the time of writing, there is **NO** conclusive evidence from across the world for our patients on biologics/immunosuppressants being worse affected by Covid-19. Though data is limited, this is reassuring, given how many patients are using these medications across the world.

The risk of stopping your medications is an uncontrolled flare of your disease, which may mean you have to take extra steroids which carry risk of infection and in some cases, severe flares can mean admission to hospital.

### **IT IS ESSENTIAL YOU FOLLOW GOVERNMENT ADVICE ON ALL MEASURES DESIGNED TO KEEP US ALL SAFE.**

We realise these are unsettled times. Please be assured that we are continually keeping up-to-date with developments so that we can look after you as well as we can.

Thank you for your patience, understanding and co-operation; please do keep yourself safe.

Yours sincerely,

The Leeds Rheumatology Team

*Enclosed in this pack is:*

- *COVID-19 advice for LTHT Rheumatology patients (as per the Trust website)*
- *NHS Government Shielding Guidance for High Risk patients*
- *Flow chart "Guide to Social Distancing for Rheumatology patients on Immunosuppressants and steroids"*