Coronavirus COVID-19

Information for people with inflammatory arthritis

Coronavirus COVID-19 Public Health Advice

Get help ➤ Covid-19 (coronavirus)

Covid-19 (coronavirus)

There are confirmed cases of Covid-19 (coronavirus) in Ireland. The risk of catching coronavirus in Ireland is still low to moderate. This may change. However, most people may continue to go to work, school and other public places, as usual.

Arthritis Ireland is aware however that treatments for inflammatory arthritis, in particular, may put patients at a higher risk of getting an infection.

What we know

- The risk in Ireland is low to moderate that you will be in contact with someone with Covid-19
- Contact is currently defined as closer than 2 metres for 15 minutes, face-to-face contact or living in the same house as someone who is infected
- Most patients will have a mild illness and recover
- The mortality is 2% and major risk factors for severe disease have been identified as being aged over 80, having chronic heart, lung disease and diabetes
- The data from studies of the outbreak in Wuhan have so far not identified immunosuppressive treatments prescribed in rheumatology patients as a risk factor for higher mortality, but it is a reasonable cause for concern and the data on the disease is being monitored

- The Covid-19 epidemic may last several months, so if you stop your medicine you will be likely to have a flare during this period and restart or have to take more intensive treatment with steroids. We do not recommend stopping your rheumatology medication.

Do not alter your medications without specific instructions to do so by your rheumatology team, who have your medical records.

Arthritis Ireland advises those living with inflammatory arthritis and taking immune-suppressing medications to follow a number of steps:

1. Knowing the symptoms

2. Ensuring regular and thorough handwashing with soap and warm water or use of alcohol-based handwashes

3. Being careful about close contact with others outside of partners and immediate family members – avoiding shaking hands

4. Being more cautious around public events or larger gatherings

5. Ensuring visitors know about susceptibility to infection and are kindly requested not to visit if they are showing any signs of illness

6. Limiting contact with people who have travelled to Ireland in the past 14 days from areas where the virus is in circulation (for example, northern Italy)

7. Being as healthy as possible – hydration, nutrition, rest, exercise, managing stress

8. Consider contingencies should a worse outbreak develop – working from home, postponing travel

9. Read the advice on https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html

Anyone who develops signs of infection should contact their GP. Attendance at an emergency department or GP clinic is not recommended, as this would increase the likelihood of coming into contact with other infections, and also raise the possibility of passing on any infection to others.

The risk of catching coronavirus in Ireland

The risk of catching coronavirus in general in Ireland is still low to moderate. This may change. However, most people may continue to go to work, school and other public places, as usual.

Follow the advice on how to protect yourself from coronavirus.

Anyone who knows they have been in close contact with a confirmed case in the last 14 days and has symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, fever) should:

- isolate themselves from other people – this means going into a different, well-ventilated room, with a phone

- phone their GP or emergency department – if this is not possible, phone 112 or 999

- in a medical emergency (if you have severe symptoms) phone 112 or 999

Close contact means either:

- face-to-face contact

- spending more than 15 minutes within 2 metres of an infected person

- living in the same house as an infected person

Symptoms of Covid-19 (coronavirus)

It can take up to 14 days for symptoms of Covid-19 (coronavirus) to show.

Symptoms of the virus include:

- a cough

- shortness of breath

- breathing difficulties

- fever (high temperature)

Further information on symptoms of Covid-19 (coronavirus) is available from the HSE.

Hygiene and prevention

The most important action we can all take is to help prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Basic hygiene is perhaps our best defence.

We encourage everyone to read the HSE's coronavirus information page, including the following do's and don'ts:

Do:

- Wash your hands properly and regularly

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough and sneeze

- Put used tissues into a bin and wash your hands

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

- Follow the travel advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs

Don't:

- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Hand washing

The HSE has also issued the following essential advice on when precisely to wash your hands:

- After coughing or sneezing

- After toilet use

- Before eating

- Before and after preparing food

- If you are in contact with a sick person, especially those with respiratory symptoms

- If your hands are dirty

- If you have handled animals or animal waste

Step-by-step guide on how to properly wash your hands and avoid infection:

1. Wet your hands with warm water and apply soap

2. Rub your hands together until the soap forms a lather

3. Rub the top of your hands, between your fingers and under your fingernails

4. Do this for about 15 seconds

5. Rinse your hands under running water

6. Dry your hands with a clean towel or paper towel

Face masks

Don't use a face mask if you feel well and do not have symptoms – there's no evidence that using masks is of any benefit if you are not sick.

Use a face mask if you:

- have or may have coronavirus

- are in close contact with someone who has or may have coronavirus

- are a healthcare worker in close contact with people who have or may have coronavirus

Travel advice

Follow travel advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) if travelling to a country or region with a spread of Covid-19 (coronavirus).

Irish citizens who are abroad, or who intend to travel abroad soon and have concerns about Covid-19 (coronavirus), can ring the department's dedicated phone line: +353 1 613 1733.

Ports and airports

There are no entry restrictions to Ireland at present.

To date, entry screening at ports and airports is not recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) or the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC).

Effective public health protocols in place at ports and airports include:

- airline crews have been briefed by the HSE in recent weeks

- in the event of a suspected case, contact tracing forms will be distributed to all passengers and completed forms will be passed to HSE lead personnel at the incident site

- prior to disembarking, passengers will be advised to contact their GPs should they develop symptoms within the following 14 days

- the airline is instructed to decontaminate the aircraft in accordance with WHO aviation hygiene standards

Advice for people who have recently returned from affected areas is available from the HSE. It is essential that everyone follows the travel advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) if travelling to a country or region with a spread of Covid-19 (coronavirus).

The Arthritis Ireland National Helpline 1890 252 846/01 661 8188 can be contacted Monday to Friday 10am-4pm or helpline@arthritisireland.ie for any queries relating to the Covid-19 (coronavirus) or living with arthritis.

Coronavirus posters

- Covid-19 poster
- Hand hygiene poster

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