

# Larne Family Practice

## Patient update - 25 Mar 20

### Coronavirus - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

#### **What are the symptoms of Coronavirus?**

Stay at home if you have coronavirus symptoms which are either:

- **A high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- **A new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual).

#### **What do I do if I have symptoms?**

Do not go to a GP Surgery, Pharmacy or Hospital. In the first instance use the NHS111 Coronavirus advice service online - <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>  
Only telephone 111 if you cannot get help online.

If you have symptoms of coronavirus you will need to stay at home for **7 days**.  
If you live with someone who has symptoms, you will need to stay at home for **14 days** from the day the first person in the home started having symptoms.

If you live with someone who is 70 or over, has a long-term condition, is pregnant or has a weakened immune system, try to find somewhere else for them to stay for 14 days. If you do have to stay at home together, try to keep away from each other as much as possible. Read the advice about staying at home by following the link - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>

In the event that your symptoms are deteriorating quickly with severe shortness of breath or any other symptoms which normally require a 999 call you must continue to use the emergency service – it is essential you mention to the 999 team that you think you might also have corona virus.

Many of our patients and clinical staff will contract the virus. Some will, have a mild case of flu like symptoms, some will be very ill with high temperatures and incessant cough and sadly some will be severely unwell requiring medical intervention.

As GPs we advise that you regularly wash your hands with soap and water (please note special, expensive soaps are not needed), keep your household surfaces clean, avoid overcrowded environments and seek medical advice early on if you have clinical symptoms.

Viruses do not respond to antibiotics and hence no acute treatment to get rid of the virus is available. The main symptoms of high temperature and sometimes a headache are best treated with paracetamol within the recommended dosage on the packaging.

There is a huge amount of information available online. Some of this is useful but some information is both incorrect and causing panic and fear. As clinicians we are committed to minimising any fear that this virus causes. With this in mind we will produce updates for you as things move forward.

## **What can I do if I don't have symptoms to minimise the risk?**

We are advising those who are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures. This group includes those who are:

- aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (ie anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds):
- chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
- chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), a learning disability or cerebral palsy
- diabetes
- problems with your spleen – for example, sickle cell disease or if you have had your spleen removed
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as HIV and AIDS, or medicines such as steroid tablets or chemotherapy
- being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
- those who are pregnant

**Note:** there are some clinical conditions which put people at **even higher risk** of severe illness from COVID-19. If you are in this category, the NHS will directly contact you with advice about the more stringent measures you should take in order to keep yourself and others safe. For now, you should rigorously **follow the social distancing advice** in full, outlined below.

People falling into this group are those who may be at particular risk due to complex health problems such as:

- people who have received an organ transplant and remain on ongoing immunosuppression medication
- people with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia who are at any stage of treatment
- people with severe chest conditions such as cystic fibrosis or severe asthma (requiring hospital admissions or courses of steroid tablets)
- people with severe diseases of body systems, such as severe kidney disease (dialysis)

## **When will I receive my At Risk Letter?**

As advertised in the media, patients who are acknowledged to be in designated At Risk groups will be receiving a letter indicating their need to self-isolate for 12 weeks.

We are having a considerable amount of calls asking when a letter will be received. These letters will **not be sent from the Practice** but centrally and will be received from week commencing Monday 24rd March 2020.

## **What is Social Distancing?**

This is a changing situation and it is best to look on the Gov website for info but general rules are:

- Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough
- Avoid non-essential use of public transport when possible
- Work from home where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to employer guidance for more information on the Gov website
- Avoid large and small gatherings in public spaces, noting that pubs, restaurants, leisure centres and similar venues are currently shut as infections spread easily in
- Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media
- Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services
- Everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is practicable.

We strongly advise you to follow the above measures as much as you can and to significantly limit your face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible, particularly if you:

- are over 70
- have an underlying health condition
- are pregnant

This advice is likely to be in place for some weeks.

## **Is the Practice Still Open?**

Yes the Practice is still open. We are running on reduced staffing due to staff isolation and distancing, however, we have now moved to telephone triage appointments first rather than you coming into the surgery in the first instance. The reason for us not seeing you straightaway isn't because we don't want to provide you with clinical care but to ensure we limit the spread of the virus; we all use the coordinated process of managing all corona virus suspected patients in the same way across the country; ensure we protect our clinical team as much as possible so that we remain able to work and provide care. If you feel that your problem is urgent and you need to be seen, please contact the surgery as you normally would.

Please be aware that when clinicians return your telephone call triage request this will probably be from a hidden number and therefore you should answer the call. We will try to contact you during a morning mainly or sometimes in an afternoon session but can't offer precise times Please be patient we are all trying to do our best. Keep your phone beside you and keep the line free.

Please do not be surprised, moving forward, if one of our GPs asks you to undertake a video consultation with them. This will be via a secure link to your smartphone and the Doctor will give you instructions how to do this if you are unsure.

## **Can I still telephone the Practice?**

As you can imagine we are dealing with an inordinate amount of telephone calls which means there may well be a wait for your call to be answered.

We understand that these are difficult and worrying times. We have been saddened and dismayed by some verbal abuse our Team has experienced on the phone and in person this week from a small number of patients. It is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in line with our Zero Tolerance Policy. We are here and want to help you!

Advice about self-isolating and other information can be found on our website at [www.larnehealthcentre.co.uk](http://www.larnehealthcentre.co.uk).

At this time, none of us know how long this disruption is likely to continue for and we would ask that all of our patients are kind to our team. It is a very worrying, stressful time for them also and some of our team suffer from ill health, have young families but are choosing to work and not self-isolate in order to provide an essential service to you and they deserve your respect and consideration. Please be patient!

### **What are you classing as non-urgent routine consultations?**

The Practice has made a decision not to undertake any non-urgent work as the clinicians try to deal with patients affected by the outbreak and those patients requiring urgent assistance that is not virus related. This includes:

- Routine blood tests
- Routine Health Checks
- Ring pessaries
- Minor Surgery
- Medicals/DVLA/HGV Examinations etc.
- Cervical Smear Tests

This list is not exhaustive.

### **Can I still order my medications from the surgeries?**

Yes you can. We would much prefer if you did this online as it does make it easier to plan our workload and keeps telephone lines free. If you have not already selected a chemist preference, please do so. Prescriptions are delivered to the local chemists twice a day again provide details of your chemist preference. Please adhere to normal collections time lines.

### **Can I have extra medications as I am self-isolating or in case I get sick?**

Please **do not ask for medications** that you have not taken for many years or for extended periods of medication outside of the normal prescriptions issued. You can order your prescription up to a week in advance in most cases to avoid running out of medication but this is your responsibility. Stockpiling, just in case, will be detrimental to the provision of all medications at a time when we need to ensure patients receive their medications as they need them.

### **Should I stop taking my anti-inflammatory medications?**

We are aware that concerns have been raised in France about the use of anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs). Some of these such as Ibuprofen and Aspirin are available over the counter. Others such as Naproxen, Diclofenac, Indometacin, Mefenamic Acid, Meloxicam, Ketoprofen and Celecoxib etc require a prescription.

There appears to be no evidence that NSAIDs increase the chance of acquiring coronavirus but concerns have been raised that taking them whilst you have a coronavirus infection may increase the complications or slow the recovery.

The Government has asked the National Institute for Care and Health Excellence and part of the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency to review the evidence. In the interim, patients who have confirmed coronavirus or believe they have coronavirus should use Paracetamol in preference to an NSAID.

## **There are shortages in the supermarkets so can I order my Paracetamol from the Practice?**

The demand for Paracetamol on prescription has also increased since the outbreak of Coronavirus. Paracetamol is available over the counter. If you have not been prescribed Paracetamol by the Practice for pain or other reason recently then your clinical need will need to be reviewed and a decision made on this basis.

## **I've seen on social media that there is an Asthma Rescue Pack available. Can I have one?**

We are aware of social media posts circulating that asthmatics (and even those that aren't), will be issued with Rescue Packs of Amoxicillin and steroids if you call the Practice. This suggestion is incorrect and the decision to use rescue packs is only made after careful evaluation for people with severe (brittle) asthma or severe COPD who are under follow up by a Specialist Respiratory Teams.

Oral steroids are powerful systemic drugs that can have an immunosuppressant effect (thus potentially increasing the severity of an infection and the risk of you passing the infection on to other people) and thus the decision to use them would rarely be delegated to a patient without careful evaluation.

Please do not contact us asking for rescue packs unless this is something that has previously been agreed with your medical team and careful instruction how to use and when has been provided. That would normally still involve discussion with the medical team where possible before starting.

As you can see, Asthma UK (do not recommend use of rescue packs as a blanket policy for people with Asthma during the pandemic.

## **Can you provide me with a sick note for my employer?**

Please use this link for employee / employer government guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/guidance-for-employers-and-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

Please note:

- those who follow advice to stay at home will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) from the first day of their absence from work – self certificate completed by the patient.
- employers should use their discretion concerning the need for medical evidence for certification for employees who are unwell. This will allow GPs to focus on their patients
- if evidence is required by an employer, those with symptoms of coronavirus can get an isolation note from [NHS 111 online](#), and those who live with someone that has symptoms can get a note from the [NHS website](#)
- employees from defined [vulnerable groups](#) should be strongly advised and supported to stay at home and work from there if possible

## **Can I come in and pick up my correspondence from the Doctor?**

We would prefer it if you didn't and therefore if needed we email correspondence to patients during this time.

**Can you provide me with a letter for my insurers to cancel my travel arrangements?**

Unfortunately no. Insurers and travel companies should be basing their decisions to offer refunds on advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Public Health, not letters from GPs. It is not a good use of GPs' time to be writing letters for patients who are not ill but have plans to travel - and GPs will always base their decisions on official advice. Patients will undoubtedly have good and sensible reasons for not wanting to travel to certain places because of the virus, but this is not the same as being unable to travel due to existing illness, and it should not become the GP's responsibility to give patients advice about where not to travel.