

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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## SECTION 1

### **What is Coronavirus (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 latest guidance about going out, social distancing and going into shops?**

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.

Although we are now allowed to exercise an unlimited number of times a day, and that businesses are being re-opened in a gradual way by the government, we still need to observe social distancing and to wear a face covering in public where adequate distancing cannot be achieved, when on public transport and when visiting hospital.

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

### **How do I make a face covering?**

Advice here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>

Fabric face masks are now becoming much more readily available to buy, they can be washed and reused.

### **What is social distancing?**

This is for EVERYONE.

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.

There are some variations to this rule depending on whether you are meeting household or “bubble” contacts, or working in an environment which has conducted a risk assessment which may allow 1 meter plus distancing.

The latest information is on this page:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/stay-alert-and-safe-social-distancing-guidance-for-young-people/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing-guidance-for-young-people>

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

Community Hubs to support Shielded patients are running, and you will have been contacted multiple times already if you are recognized to need to shield. The citizens advice bureau, clinical team from the surgery and the council are all involved in monitoring your need for support. Currently the proposed end date for shielding is the 31st July. If we encounter a “second wave” of infections, people may be required to shield again to protect themselves.

<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 37.8 degrees or above OR a new loss of taste or smell needs to self-isolate for **10 days**. This is per latest chief medical officer advice as of 30/7/20. They need to get a coronavirus test as soon as practical.

Details on how to get a test arranged here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>

**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/>

**“What if my employer says I need a fit note to cover 7-14 days self isolation before an operation?”**

If someone at the hospital has asked you to self isolate for 14 days before a procedure or having surgery and you are working, please discuss with your employer who should be sympathetic to the current rules. If a fit note is required, please contact your hospital specialist. If you have been asked by the hospital to self-isolate for 7 days due to a more minor procedure, then you are able to self-certificate.

**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 GPS, 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 central 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.

We are excited to be using a new system called Accurx, which allows us to send messages and receive information back from you (written and photo (which is helpful for skin problems)), this information is then transferred into your notes at the click of a button. If you are contacting us about a skin problem, reception are likely to offer you the ability to send a photograph, with your consent.

This system is secure and compliant with latest information governance.

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. Not all GPS sites will be seeing face to face patients.

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 most reviews remotely either by phone and/or video consultation. We are exploring a “one stop” diabetes review, with blood tests, blood pressure and foot checks done by a healthcare assistant, and the review of the results by a doctor or diabetes nurse 1-2 weeks later. Asthma/COPD review is likely to be done by a nurse over the phone or by video consult. The provision of face to face services will depend as the advice from the government evolves, and is dependent on the required PPE being available.

**I’m pregnant — what do I need to do?**

Please book to see the Midwife by telephoning reception 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 be at a different GPS site than you normally attend. 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?**

We have recommenced depot contraception appointments, and reception can book you in for this. Please be aware however that if we encounter a “second wave” or Covid19, this provision may be suspended and alternative methods of contraception will need to be discussed with a clinician.

**What about cervical smears?**

The labs have only recently started accepting smear samples again, having previously been focused on only processing Coronavirus tests. If you are due your smear test please phone us and you will be added to the waiting list, we have re-starting smear clinics, but the ongoing provision may change depending on government advice, availability of PPE and the labs not having to be re-purposed to coronavirus testing once more.

**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.

**What about other injections like B12 or joint injections?**

Please call reception who will advise you on the current plan to provide these. There will be specialist clinics put on by clinicians from the week commencing 15/6/20 though this is subject to review.

**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?**

Hospitals are cautiously “turning back on” their outpatient referral systems. We anticipate longer than normal waiting times for appointments, and we are unable to influence the speed at which the

hospital will see you. To therefore help avoid awkward situations in the consultation with your GP, please do not ask us about timescales and prioritization as it is beyond our ability to control. We are now able to request x-rays and scans in a limited fashion but it is likely that only more clinically urgent things would be appropriate to request at this time.

## SECTION 3

### **What do I do about my prescribed medications?**

GPS 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 endeavour 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 routine 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 apixaban. 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 angiotensin 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' (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/doctor's 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 if we have any queries, or otherwise process the request. We are sending the documents through a secure text based system called ACCURX so please ensure your mobile phone contact details are up to date.

### **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

### **What to do if you think you need ambulance transport to your appointment at hospital?**

This should be booked by you, the patient, or your representative at:

<https://www.bhamcommunity.nhs.uk/patients-public/non-emergency-patient-transport/>

### **What is the situation with hospital and GP requested blood tests?**

In summary:

If a **hospital practitioner** is the one requesting a blood test **they** must issue you the form and the blood test **must** be taken in the phlebotomy department at the HOSPITAL (we appreciate this may be less convenient for you than attending a GPS site but please see below\*)

If a **GPS practitioner** is the one requesting a blood test then this **must** be taken at a GPS site, even if you might have historically gone to hospital either for convenience, or because you have fainted before, or if you are difficult to bleed.

If you are prone to fainting or are hard to bleed, please inform the receptionist at the time of booking, so that appropriate notes can be made on your appointment booking. Please ensure you are well hydrated and not cold when you come for your test. This helps to ensure getting the sample is easier and quicker for you.

- \* The CCG for Birmingham and Solihull have made it very clear to all parties that these rules are rigid and have to be adhered to. They are actively monitoring the situation.

## SECTION 6

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:

IAPT (improving access to psychological therapies). Self referral. Ring 024 7667 1090

Website <https://www.covwarkpt.nhs.uk/iapt/>

IAPT services are for people with mild, moderate and moderate to severe, symptoms of anxiety or depression, living in Coventry, Solihull or Warwickshire.

The Samaritans on 116123 and Mental Health Matters on 0800 616 171 or 0300 330 5487

### **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/>

### **What support is available to me if I am in financial hardship as a result of Covid19?**

The government have been running their Furlough scheme for qualifying employees, and a package of support for self employed persons. It is still possible to apply for state benefits if you are out of work or unable to work.

Details here: <https://www.gov.uk/business-coronavirus-support-finder>

And here: <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>

In addition there is a local hardship fund for care workers, details here:

<https://www.thecareworkerscharity.org.uk/solihull-covid-19-emergency-fund/>

### **What if I have concerns about suspected domestic abuse:**

If you have a concern that someone is being abused or neglected, it is important that you raise that concern immediately. To report your concerns - call Adult Social Care on **0121 704 8007** or if someone is in immediate danger call the police on 999.

If you are a female victim of domestic abuse and are in immediate danger, phone the police on 999. If you cannot speak, once the call has been answered and you are silent for a short while, you will hear a recorded message after which you dial 55 to be put through to a police call handler.

Details here : [https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent\\_solution\\_guide.pdf](https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/research-learning/Silent_solution_guide.pdf)

**Birmingham Womens aid:**

Our helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9:15 am to 5:15 pm  
Alternatively email us at  
[info@bswaid.org](mailto:info@bswaid.org)

**Phone : [0808 800 0028](tel:08088000028)      National number 0808 2000 247**

For male victims: <https://mensadviceline.org.uk/> 0808 801 0327 or  
email [info@mensadviceline.org.uk](mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk)

Opening hours: Monday-Friday 10am-1pm and 2-5pm

The Men's Advice Line provides a range of services aimed primarily at men experiencing domestic abuse from their partner.

For those who have suffered rape or sexual abuse: <https://www.survivorsuk.org/>