

Advice for patients who take replacement steroids (hydrocortisone, prednisolone, dexamethasone or plenadren) for pituitary/adrenal insufficiency

A number of you have been in touch looking for advice relating to the global Coronavirus (also known as COVID-19) outbreak. If you are on steroid replacement therapy for pituitary or adrenal disease, or care for someone who is, and you're worried about Coronavirus, we've brought together a number of resources that we hope you will find useful.

The World Health Organization has declared the Coronavirus outbreak to be a public health emergency of international concern. In response, the UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the public.

If you have adrenal insufficiency (steroid dependent) and you become unwell for any reason, it's important that you follow sick day rules. This means in the first instance that you double your usual doses of glucocorticoid replacement.

The term adrenal insufficiency includes Addison's disease with primary adrenal failure, patients with pituitary problem including secondary adrenal failure and patients with congenital adrenal hyperplasia.

The government has recently recommended that those at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus should be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures. On the basis of current data, there is no evidence that patients with adrenal insufficiency are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. However, we know that patients with Addison's disease (primary adrenal insufficiency) and congenital adrenal hyperplasia have a slightly increased overall risk of catching infections. In addition, patients with adrenal insufficiency would require additional measures when severely unwell (hydrocortisone injection and infusion) to avoid an adrenal crisis.

The recently published list of people considered vulnerable includes anyone instructed to get a flu jab as an adult each year on medical grounds as well as all people whose medication includes steroid tablets. Whilst adrenal insufficiency is not specifically mentioned in this guidance, both of these criteria apply to patients with adrenal insufficiency. Patients with adrenal insufficiency are recommended to have flu vaccinations, as this would not only prevent illness from the flu itself but also reduce complications arising from managing the adrenal insufficiency during severe illness. We would therefore consider patients with adrenal insufficiency part of the group of vulnerable individuals who should, therefore, be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures.

The government and NHS are continually updating their advice and information in relation to Coronavirus. These resources are the most up-to-date information currently available, so we recommend you check them first if you have any worries or concerns.

Where to get general information:

The most up-to-date information about the outbreak, including information for returning travellers, can be found on the [gov.uk website](https://www.gov.uk) and at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Tailored information for people living in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can also be found at:

- [Public Health Wales](#)
- [Health Protection Scotland](#)
- [Public Health Agency \(NI\)](#)

The NHS also has [up-to-date advice](#) on what to do if you've recently returned from travel abroad, symptoms to look out for, and action to take if you become unwell.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has information and advice for [British people travelling and living overseas](#).

Specific information for patients with adrenal insufficiency:

- At present we do not know if patients with adrenal insufficiency are at higher risk of catching coronavirus' and we advise patients with adrenal insufficiency to follow recommendations on the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/> to minimise risk of catching and transmitting the virus. All patients should follow the usual steroid sick day rules:

Sick Day Rule 1: Double daily oral glucocorticoid dose during illness with fever that requires bed rest and/or antibiotics.

Sick Day Rule 2: Administer glucocorticoids (i.v. or i.m. injection) during prolonged vomiting or diarrhoea, during preparation for colonoscopy or in case of acute trauma or surgery.

(<https://doi.org/10.1530/EC-16-0054>)

If in doubt please contact your endocrine team for advice.

- Patients should make sure they have sufficient additional hydrocortisone supply including injections.
- Patients should make sure the doctors and other health care professionals looking after them are aware that they require an increased dose of steroids or steroids as injection as per sick day rules.
- Patients should follow the stringent social distancing rules and are:
 - Strongly advised against social mixing in the community
 - Strongly advised against having friends and family to the house
 - Strongly advised to use remote access to NHS and essential services
 - Strongly advised to vary daily commute and use less public transport
 - Strongly advised to work from home

If you become unwell, in non-emergency situations, NHS 111 will be able to give specific advice. In an emergency, call 999 immediately.