



Information for solid organ transplant recipients

The current pandemic with Covid-19 (more properly called SARS-Cov-2) has resulted in a worrying time for all but a particularly difficult time for those taking immunosuppressive drugs such as are needed following an organ transplant. Those on immunosuppression are not at greater risk of becoming infected but may be at greater risk of severe disease if they get infected.

As the pandemic has unfolded, we are learning more about the virus, how it is spread, how it may affect people and finding new treatments. There are still many areas where the answer is just not known. Furthermore, data may be misleading for many reasons, such as different countries use different definitions, have different populations and vary in testing procedures.

Transplant Sport would like to give some advice for transplant recipients and their families:

- Listen to and follow national guidelines: these can be found on-line. Information and advice will vary between the four UK nations.
- Avoid contracting the virus:
 - follow national guidance
 - keep your distance from others
 - pay attention to hand hygiene – wash frequently with soap and water and use hand sanitiser
 - wear a face mask where advised to do so
- Those who are at increased risk of severe disease include
 - Older age
 - Male gender
 - Some ethnicities, especially south Asian and Afro-Caribbean
 - Obesity
 - Smokers
 - Co-morbidities especially heart disease, lung disease, diabetes
- People taking immunosuppressive drugs: the evidence is still not clear whether immunosuppressed people are at greater risk or whether infection presents differently. See the Comment from Johns Hopkins Hospital below. However, it is sensible to assume the risk of severe disease is greater and act accordingly.

Advice:

- do not alter your medication without the advice of your transplant team
- make sure you do not run out of medication – it may take longer to get your prescription
- hospitals may defer out-patient appointments or investigations or hold telephone or video clinics. Each patient is individually assessed. If you are in doubt, contact your clinic.
- Exercise:
 - Exercise is important for everyone in improving mental wellbeing and physical health
 - Continue to take exercise within the guidelines: you should not use swimming pools or take part in contact sports at this time but do make sure you stay healthy by cycling, walking, jogging or running or doing simple exercises such as press-ups, aerobics, or Pilates. You can also play some sports outside such as basketball, tennis, golf and fishing.
 - Exercise should be fun and enjoyable so find out what you like doing it and do it regularly within your capabilities

At the current time, advice from the UK Government is 'you can travel for physical activity but you should not travel with someone from outside your household unless you can practise social distancing - for example by cycling. It is not possible to practice effective social distancing in small vehicles. You should consider all other forms of transport before using public transport.

However, all these activities must be undertaken alone, or with members of your household or, providing you are following social distancing guidelines, with up to but no more than 5 other people from outside your household. Two households can also meet, provided members of different households can follow social distancing guidelines.

Where possible, you should limit sharing of equipment, so use your own tennis racquet, golf clubs, fishing rods or basketball, but if you do have to share, practise strict hand hygiene and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water both before and after using the equipment.

Personal training or coaching is allowed if outside and if people are able to follow social distancing guidelines and provided no more than 6 people from different households are gathering.

Sources of advice

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>

Scotland: <https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Wales: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

N Ireland: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>

NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Comment from Johns Hopkins University

If I take immune-suppressing medication, should I stop so I'll have a better chance of avoiding COVID-19 infection?

Research into COVID-19 and patients who take immunosuppressing drugs is still scarce. However, investigations from Italy found that patients with systemic autoimmune diseases do not seem to have an increased risk of becoming infected. Needless to say, immunosuppression impairs innate and adaptive immunity and is a risk factor for severe COVID-19 illness. While this holds true for the majority of patients, a subset of COVID-19 patients exhibit “hyper-inflammation”— an immune system activation triggered by the virus. The impact of initiating immunosuppression in these COVID-19 patients is being tested in several ongoing clinical trials. Patients should consult with their physician on the need to take immune system-suppressing medication. Some circumstances require long-term intake of immunosuppressing drugs, [such as with] organ transplantation and abrupt withdrawal poses a risk to patients to have organ failure due to rejection. This in turn would lead to hospitalization and the need to intensify treatment—increasing not only the chance of becoming infected but also the risk of a severe COVID-19 disease course.

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