

ST. JAMES'S HOSPITAL LABMED DIRECTORATE			
Edition No.:	02	Immunology Form	Doc No: DOC374
Authorised By	Dr. Niall Conlon	Date: 19.03.2020	Date of Issue: 19.03.2020

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Information for St. James's Hospital Immunology Patients

This problem is rapidly evolving – check hse.ie for up to date information

Who is this information for?

This information is for patients of St. James's Hospital Department of Immunology who may have a diagnosis of an immunodeficiency disorder (primary or secondary) or be on immunosuppressant medication (including steroids).

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause colds, coughs and sometimes more severe infections. COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that can affect your lungs and airways. Most people (80% or 80 in 100) have mild symptoms and recover with no treatment. Some people will develop symptoms that are severe enough to attend hospital. A small number of people may die from this infection (2-4% or 2-4 in 100).

There are confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Ireland and the virus is likely to be circulating in the community

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- cough
- shortness of breath
- breathing difficulties
- fever (high temperature)

It is important to understand that, at present, these symptoms are still much more likely to be caused by another infection that is not COVID-19

How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is a viral infection that is spread from person to person by droplets that are present in coughs, sneezes or even breathing out. Droplets land on surfaces that are then touched by other people who then touch their eyes nose or mouth. It is thought that droplets can also result in spread when in close contact with an infected person who is coughing and sneezing (close contact is defined as more than 15 minutes of face to face contact within 2 metres of an infected person).

Are people with immune system disorders or those on immune suppression at special risk?

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This is a new virus and we are still learning much about the risks. There is little information on how COVID-19 affects people with immune system disorders or those on immune suppression. It is thought that older people (>60 years), those with heart and lung diseases, diabetes or cancer may be at increased risk of severe symptoms and patients with immune system disorders may also fall into these groups. It is known that other lung viruses can cause severe illness in people that have a weak immune system – this is likely to be true for COVID-19

How can I reduce the chance of infection?

Hand hygiene is the single most important step in preventing spread of COVID-19. Washing your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water will reduce your risk of infection. Alcohol hand gel is also useful especially when out and about. You should take extra care with hand hygiene at this time.

We are now recommending 'cocooning' for patients with a known diagnosis of immunodeficiency or patients on immunosuppression

This means you should restrict your movements as much as possible

- Do not go to college or work
- Do not use public transport
- Do not go to meetings, social gatherings, group events or crowded places
- Do not have visitors at your home
- Where possible order groceries online or have family/friends drop them off
- Do not travel outside or within Ireland
- **Do – practice self-care, stay in touch with friends and family by telephone, video call or social media.**

You should also follow HSE advice to prevent the spread of infection:

- Cover your mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in bin and wash your hands after coughing or sneezing
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
- **Avoid close contact with people who are not well**
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces

This advice should be followed at all times – not just in relation to COVID-19.

Please do not change your medications without consulting your Immunology team – in particular stopping steroids suddenly can be very dangerous.

Should I wear a face mask?

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Face masks are generally not effective outside a healthcare setting. There is probably a greater risk of contaminating your face from your hands when adjusting a mask than there is benefit from wearing a mask. In addition, they have to be changed too frequently for general use.

I am unwell and I think I may have COVID-19/Coronavirus – what should I do?

You should NOT attend the immunology Day Ward. You should contact your GP or Emergency Department by telephone who will be able to advise you regarding testing. You should also contact the Immunology Department through St. James's Hospital switchboard.

You should self-isolate until given further advice by a healthcare professional.

If you have a medical emergency (if you have severe symptoms) then you should contact **999 or 112**.

Where can I get up to date information?

Please keep up to date with the latest advice from the HSE

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus.html>

If travelling please be aware of the latest advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs

<https://www.dfa.ie/travel/travel-advice/coronavirus/>