

FOR PATIENTS WHO USUALLY SELF-INJECT THEIR MEDICATION AT HOME

In response to the current Coronavirus pandemic, we are responding to Government guidance and making changes to the way we offer dermatology services. This is primarily to protect patient safety by limiting travel and hospital visits where possible and to avoid crowding in our waiting rooms. We are writing to you as you regularly attend the combined psoriasis (biologics clinic) in dermatology at the RVI.

From your medical records, it appears that you are taking a medicine that targets your immune system. COVID 19 may pose a higher risk to you and therefore specific measures are advised.

Specific measures advised

There are two categories of measures: **very careful social distancing** and **shielding**

Asking people to stay at home and avoid contact is a form of social distancing. For people taking drugs that target the immune system, very careful social distancing is advised. You can read the social distancing guidance on the GOV.UK website.

Shielding is a measure to protect people who are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) by minimising all face to face interaction between those who are extremely vulnerable and others. Shielding is a step up from very careful social distancing. People advised to shield should not leave their home for 12 weeks (current estimate until late June 2020). If you fall within this group, you should have received a letter from the RVI and/or your GP. You can read the shielding guidance on the GOV.UK website. If you think you fall within this group but have not received a letter please let us know by email nuth.biologicsqueries@nhs.net or telephone on 0191 282 4783

Should I stop my medicine?

Currently, we do not advise you stop your medicine without prior discussion with your specialist doctor. Stopping your treatment could worsen your skin condition resulting in need for hospital treatment. We are carefully monitoring the situation and the national and international recommendations.

Your next appointments and injections

On the other hand, if you develop symptoms of Coronavirus infection or if a member of your household has symptoms of Coronavirus infection and you are self-isolating, you should not administer any doses of biologics/immunosuppressant during this period until it is clear you are well. The exception to this is if you are taking corticosteroids (prednisolone or hydrocortisone tablets) as this should not be stopped abruptly (please refer to the GOV.UK website).

We note that you that you usually receive your biologic by self-injection. If you receive your injections via home deliveries (e.g. home care at home) these will continue as normal.

If you usually collect these from the RVI pharmacy, receipt of these will depend on the following factors:

1. If you are **not** "shielding" we would ask that you collect a prepared prescription from the Dermatology Outpatients Department and take this to the hospital pharmacy as usual. You will also be supplied with a sharps bin to safely dispose of the injection once used.

2. If you are in the shielding category of patients and have a friend or relative who you could nominate as a “proxy” to collect the medication on your behalf, this could be collected in the same way as point 1.
3. If you are in the shielding category of patients and do not have a suitable proxy to assist in the delivery of your biologic, we can arrange hospital courier delivery of the medication.

Our hospital courier service is under significant pressure at present and there may be a wait of over a week for a delivery slot. We therefore ask where possible that you nominate a proxy to pick them up on your behalf, if it is not safe for you to attend in person. Please ensure your proxy has a cool bag to keep the injections at the correct temperature in transit.

NEXT STEP:

Please do not come to your next appointment unless otherwise instructed. We are aiming to minimise the number of patients that need to come to the RVI until further notice. We will check your records and see if you need any blood tests. If you do we will contact you. We will send you a new appointment for clinic review after the Pandemic has settled.

If you are suffering any problems, then we would be happy to arrange a telephone or face to face consultation for you.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us via email:

nuth.biologicsqueries@nhs.net or on 0191 282 4783. **Please include your name, date of birth, hospital or nhs number and an up to date contact telephone number with your message.**

If you do have an appointment and are unwell with cough, fever or other symptoms please **do not attend**, but you can contact us as above for advice.

We thank you in advance for your understanding and cooperation in these unprecedented times.