

Emergency Department

COVID-19 Patient Advice

This leaflet offers more information about COVID-19. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a type of virus called a coronavirus. It can often cause symptoms such as those associated with a common cold. The coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus first identified in China in late 2019. It has spread across the world and the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the outbreak a pandemic. It can cause severe lung infection and death.

How do you catch COVID-19?

COVID-19 spreads from person to person. It can be spread by coughing and sneezing or even by touching objects and surfaces that have the virus on them. Infected persons can also spread the virus even before they develop any symptoms.

Prevention

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after being in a public place, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser containing at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces frequently, including door handles, telephones and light switches.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Wear a mask in places where social distancing of two metres cannot be maintained.
- Follow any regional or national policies on social distancing and prevention measures.
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/social-distancing/>

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms are varied. Some don't get any symptoms at all, but many will have an illness like a bad cold or flu. Some people will have a more severe illness like pneumonia and need hospital admission.

The most common symptoms are:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

- Loss of sense of smell
- Loss of taste.

Other less common symptoms:

- Aches and pains
- Abdominal (tummy) pain
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling tired
- Sore throat
- Dizziness
- Conjunctivitis
- Headache
- Skin rashes.

Risk factors for severe disease:

- >70 years old
- Male
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Smoker
- Chronic lung disease
- Obesity
- Cardiovascular disease (you have had a heart attack or a stroke)
- Organ transplant
- Cancer.

Children seem to get infected less frequently than adults and those who do become infected usually have had close contact with an infected person.

There have been reports of COVID-19 causing a severe illness in children: a fever lasting more than five days, a rash, swollen glands in the neck, red fingers or toes and dry, cracked lips. This is very rare but if you have concerns about your child, it's very important to speak to a doctor as soon as possible.

In pregnancy, the symptoms are the same as in those who are not pregnant. If you are pregnant and you develop COVID-19 symptoms, you should contact your doctor straightaway. You might need regular ultrasound scans during your pregnancy if you have had COVID-19 and you and your baby may need extra monitoring during labour and after the birth. The UK recommends that pregnant women follow strict social distancing measures.

Due to the varied symptoms which can be similar to a bad cold or flu, it can be hard to diagnose COVID-19 without testing. If you have symptoms, please arrange a test by calling 119 between 7am and 11pm or going online:

<https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>

Remember to follow government guidelines on self-isolating. Guidelines can be found at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

If you become ill, you should:

- Stay home and avoid contact with other people.
- Seek medical advice – Contact your GP or call NHS 111 or go online: <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>
- Cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) and put the tissue in the bin.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose or being in a public place. If hand washing facilities are not available, please use an alcohol-based sanitiser containing at least 60% alcohol.

Home Treatment

Seriously ill patients will be isolated and treated in hospitals.

Those with mild symptoms of suspected COVID-19 can be managed at home, ideally in a well-ventilated room by themselves and they should stay in that room as much as possible, so as not to spread the infection to the rest of the household.

Currently the person with symptoms needs to isolate for at least 10 days from onset of symptoms.

The rest of the household needs to isolate for 14 days (as they may develop symptoms at a later stage) to reduce the spread of the infection in the community.

- Limit the number of people looking after the ill person.
- Ideally, anyone looking after the ill person should be in good health.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after touching the ill person.
- Dispose carefully of any tissues the person uses.
- Don't share anything like towels or bedclothes with the ill person.
- Carefully wash any plates, drinking glasses and cutlery after use.
- Regularly wipe and disinfect any surfaces the person touches regularly, e.g. bedside tables.
- Clean toilet and bathroom surfaces regularly.
- Clean all clothes, bedclothes, and towels used by the ill person at 60 to 90°C.
- Keep taking any prescribed medications, unless your doctor recommends that you stop.

Ring 999 if:

- You are unable to complete short sentences at rest due to breathlessness.
- Your breathing suddenly worsens within an hour
- or you have more general signs of serious illness:
- Coughing up blood.
- Have blue lips.
- Feel cold and sweaty with pale or blotchy skin,
- You have a rash that doesn't fade when you roll a glass over it,
- You collapse or faint.
- You become agitated, confused or very drowsy.
- You have stopped peeing or are peeing much less than usual.

Recovery and Long Covid

Most people recover fairly quickly but up to 10% will have symptoms lasting for more than three weeks and sometimes months. This can happen to people of any age.

Symptoms can come and go, meaning you may have good and bad days.

Most common symptoms:

- Coughing
- Fatigue
- Low grade fever.

Others:

- Shortness of breath
- Pain (general aches and pains, headaches, chest pain)
- Rashes
- Upset stomach
- Problems with memory and concentration
- Mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Please speak to your GP or seek medical attention about this. You may need further investigations. If you were admitted to hospital with COVID-19, you will have follow-up. If you weren't admitted, speak to your GP about the options available in your area, including for any mental health issues (e.g. anxiety) which you may be experiencing.

Useful sources of information

Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation

<https://www.post-covid.org.uk/get-support/>

NHS Get support after COVID-19

<https://www.yourcovidrecovery.nhs.uk>

Supporting your Mental Health

These are very uncertain times and it is normal to feel worried, bored, frustrated, lonely or low. Here are some ways to look after your mental health during the coronavirus pandemic.

- Stay connected with family and friends by phone and/or social media
- Exercise regularly
- Eat healthy meals and drink plenty of water
- Try not to drink too much alcohol
- Keep doing things you enjoy (e.g. baking, knitting, reading)
- Talk about your worries to friends and family and seek professional help if you are becoming overwhelmed by your feelings. There are many talking therapies depending on your borough:
 - Wandsworth: <https://www.talkwandsworth.nhs.uk>
 - Merton: <https://www.mertonuplift.nhs.uk/psychological-therapies>
 - Kingston: <https://www.icope.nhs.uk/kingston/>
 - Richmond: <https://www.richmondwellbeingservice.nhs.uk>
 - Sutton: <https://www.suttonuplift.co.uk>
- Try and maintain a good sleeping pattern
- Stop smoking – it is never too late to stop.

References:

1. <https://bestpractice.bmj.com/patient-leaflets/en-gb/pdf/3000166/Coronavirus.pdf>
2. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
3. <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus>
4. <https://www.post-covid.org.uk/for-professionals/>
5. <https://111.nhs.uk>
6. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/clinical-management-of-covid-19>

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency.

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk).

The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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