

Living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) during the COVID-19 pandemic

Information for patients with COPD

If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) then this leaflet is for you. This will help to keep you informed of the differences between symptoms of an exacerbation (worsening of symptoms) of COPD and the symptoms of COVID-19.

It is important to keep informed and to be able to know what your normal COPD exacerbation looks and feels like, and monitor for any changes.

Symptoms of COVID-19:

- High temperature
- New continuous cough
- Loss of or change in sense of smell or taste

Other Symptoms of Covid-19:

- Fatigue
- Sputum production
- Muscle aches
- Sore throat
- Headache

More serious warning signs include:

- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath (also a common symptom of COPD)
- Persistent pain or pressure in your chest
- New confusion or inability to wake from sleep
- Bluish lips or face.

Symptom differences between COPD exacerbation and Covid-19:

- High fever is a common symptom of COVID-19, but not a common symptom of a COPD exacerbation
- Dry cough is a common symptom of COVID-19 whereas most people with exacerbation of COPD have a more productive cough
- Increased wheezing can occur during COPD exacerbation, but is rare in COVID-19
- Runny nose is rare in COVID-19
- Shortness of breath is a common symptom of both exacerbation of COPD and severe COVID-19.

If you have COPD and you develop common symptoms of COVID-19 and any of the serious symptoms then seek medical attention immediately.

| Symptoms | COVID-19 | Exacerbation of COPD |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| High fever | Common | Rare |
| Cough | Common (usually dry) | Common (usually wet) |
| Breathlessness | Sometimes. This is a sign of a more severe case of COVID-19 that needs medical attention | Common |
| Loss of sense of smell or taste | Sometimes | No |
| Muscle ache | Sometimes | Rare |
| Wheeze | Rare | Sometimes |
| Runny nose | Rare | Sometimes |

If you develop shortness of breath, together with any main symptom of COVID-19, such as a new cough or high temperature, then phone NHS 24 on 111 urgently

Staying safe during Covid-19

Shielding

- If you have severe or very severe COPD then follow the government's shielding advice
- If you need to attend an appointment and you **do not** have symptoms of COVID-19, try to do this alone if possible, or with no more than one other person- this reduces the risk of getting or spreading the coronavirus.

Self-Management of COPD

- Follow your COPD self-management plan - if you think you have an exacerbation (worsening of symptoms). Start steroid tablets and/or antibiotics as explained in your plan
- Speak to your doctor about whether you may need an advance care plan
- Try to boost your mental and physical health if you can
- If you smoke, try quitting smoking- you can ask for additional support from your GP
- Seek medical help if you need to
- If you think you have an exacerbation that feels different from your "usual" exacerbation then seek medical advice from your care team
- If you have symptoms of COVID-19 such as a high fever, dry cough, or muscle ache, you should self-isolate. **Do not use your rescue pack** if you only have these symptoms and **call NHS 24 on 111**.

Self-Management of COVID-19

- Monitor your symptoms and get medical help if needed
- Rest, sleep and drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration
- Control your symptoms by taking over-the-counter medications (such as paracetamol)
- Please follow the instructions with medication and check that you do not have any side effects.

Medication

Steroid Inhaler: If you are prescribed inhalers, continue to use them as prescribed by your healthcare professional. There is no evidence that using inhaled corticosteroids for COPD increases the risk associated with COVID-19.

Steroid Tablets: If you are prescribed steroid tablets, continue to use them as prescribed by your healthcare professional. They help to control the inflammation in the lungs and stopping them can be harmful.

Do not start steroid tablets for symptoms of COVID-19 (for example fever, dry cough, or muscle ache).

Antibiotics: If you are prescribed prophylactic antibiotics, continue to take them as prescribed by your healthcare professional, unless you have any side effects or an allergy- contact your care team if that happens.

Do not start antibiotics for symptoms of COVID-19 (for example fever, dry cough, or muscle ache), unless advised by your healthcare professional.

Equipment

Oxygen: If you receive long-term oxygen, do not adjust your oxygen flow rate unless advised by your healthcare professional.

If you receive ambulatory oxygen (portable oxygen, or “oxygen for walking”) do not start using it at rest or at home.

Nebuliser: If you live with other people and if you have symptoms of COVID-19, please seek advice from your health care professional team before using your nebuliser. Otherwise, you can continue to use your nebuliser if you have been given one by your healthcare professional.

Non-Invasive Ventilation: If you use non-invasive ventilation, use it in a well-ventilated room and away from other members of your household. This is to prevent infecting other members of your household.

Techniques

Airway clearance techniques: If you currently use lung clearance techniques, continue to do so in a well-ventilated room and away from other members of your household if possible. Advise other members of your household not to enter the room until enough time has passed to reduce the risk of getting infected.

Hygiene: Maintain good hygiene to avoid getting COVID-19. Wash your hands and clean your equipment regularly (including face masks, mouth pieces, spacers, peak flow

meters and nebulisers) using washing-up liquid and following the manufacturers' cleaning instructions.

Do not share any equipment with anyone else.

If you are prescribed inhalers, continue to use them as prescribed by your healthcare professional. There is no evidence that using inhaled corticosteroids for COPD increases the risk associated with COVID-19.

Further Information

You can find further information on COPD and COVID-19 at the following websites:

NHS Scotland: www.nhsinform.scot

British Lung Foundation: www.blf.org.uk

NHS: www.nhs.uk

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