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## Rheumatology Department

# Coronavirus/ COVID 19 risk advice for patients on immunosuppressants

## Introduction

We know people are concerned about the potential impact of coronavirus/COVID-19. We understand that this is a significant cause of concern for people with rheumatological conditions and who are on medications for their conditions.

New information is emerging rapidly, so please read advice on the sites below which you can consult for regularly updated information. NHS websites:

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Please note: We are systematically switching all our outpatient appointments to telephone contact 'appointments'. If you have an appointment scheduled we will call you on your registered phone line. Please ensure your number is 'unblocked' for the appointment – we will probably call from the hospital number but it may be one of a number of different numbers.

**First, we advise do not stop your immunosuppressant medications.** The diagram below explains what your risk is because of the immunosuppressant(s) drug(s) you take. Please follow the diagram carefully. You will need to also refer to Government advice to understand **SOCIAL DISTANCING** and **SHIELDING**. These terms are explained on the Government websites listed above and details have been posted on-line by The BBC also.

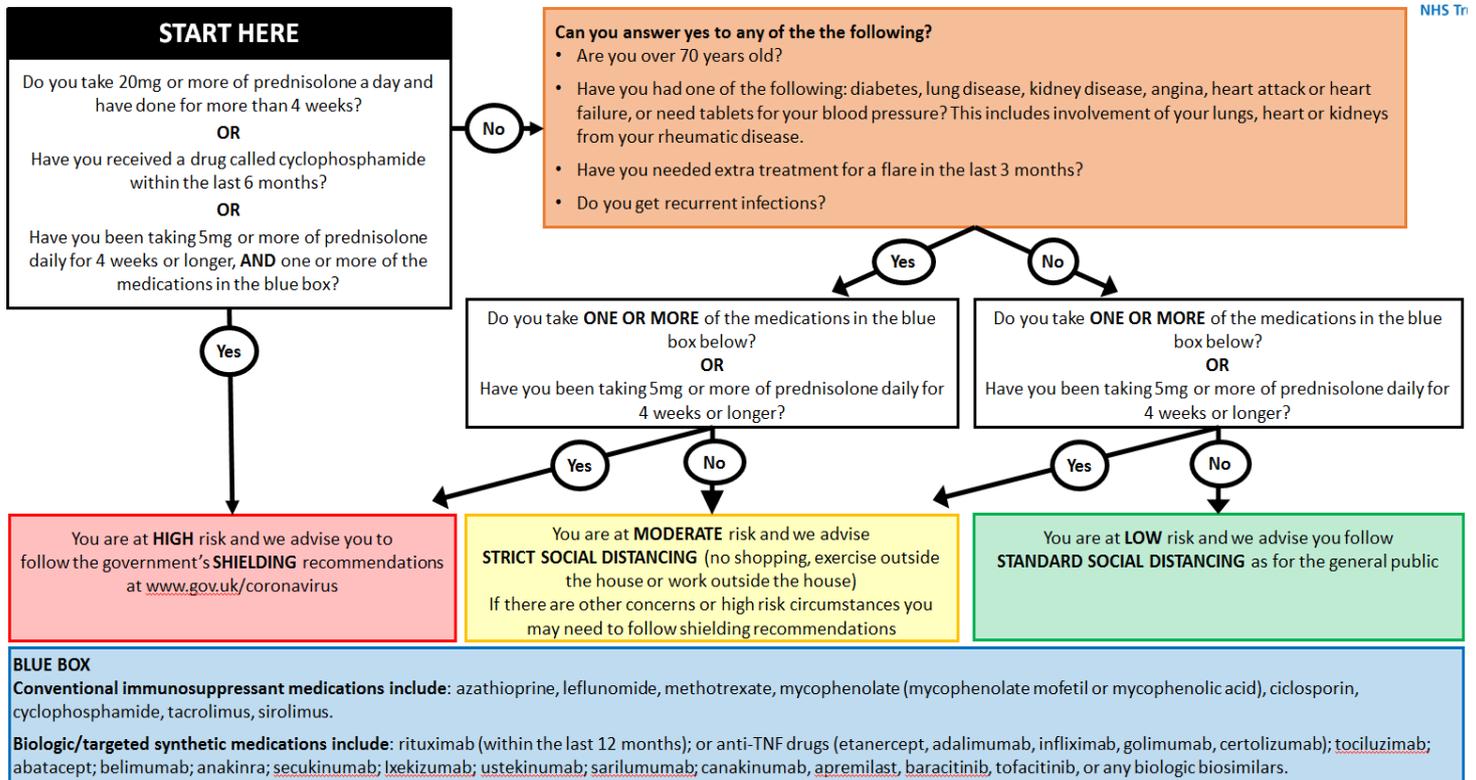
Our advice here is in keeping here with the National British Society for Rheumatology Guidelines

<https://www.rheumatology.org.uk/news-policy/details/Covid19-Coronavirus-update-members>

**If you are showing any symptoms (cough, fever, shortness of breath) and you think you might have coronavirus/COVID-19 or have been in close contact with someone who has it, then stop your immunosuppressant drug(s) – those listed in the blue box below - and follow The Government's advice (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>).**

Remain off the drug(s) until fully recovered, when you can re-start your drugs, and recommence your blood tests. **Do not stop steroids (prednisolone) however if you think you might have coronavirus/COVID-19 or have been in close contact with someone who has it.** Stopping steroids suddenly, without stepping down the dose over a period of time, can be dangerous. If you are on prednisolone and infection symptoms

(cough, fever, breathlessness) worsen, use the coronavirus service (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19> )



**Note 1.** Please note sulfasalazine, and hydroxychloroquine are deliberately not included in these lists of medications – the risk is lower with these drugs

**Note 2. Blood tests.** If you've been on a stable dose of your conventional immunosuppressant, with no side effects, for 6 months or more, you can switch your blood tests to once every 3 months. If you've been on a stable dose of your biologic immunosuppressant, with no side effects including low white cell count or liver toxicity, for 6 months or more, you can switch your blood tests to once every 6 months. Please phone your GP to plan any required blood tests to ensure safe processes can be put in place



We are a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

**Other formats:**



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**Document history**

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