

The COVID-19 pandemic – will it affect your operation?



Information for patients

Coming into hospital for an operation, for any reason, is a worrying time for you and your family. Your worry is likely to be increased at this time because of the circulating coronavirus causing COVID-19.

The virus is also a great concern for the hospital team looking after you. We know that most people who catch COVID-19 have a mild illness and get better. The problem for you and your operation, is that if you catch COVID-19 around the time of your operation, your chance of dying from COVID-19 is much higher. This increased risk will depend on other things about you, including your age, what other health problems you have, and the type of operation that you are having. Many operations just now are in patients with cancer, and you may have had recent chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy. These treatments also reduce your chance of surviving COVID-19 infection around the time of surgery.

Will self-isolation stop me catching COVID-19 before my operation?

Yes, self-isolation for 2 weeks before coming into hospital is one of the best ways to minimise your risk of coming into hospital with COVID-19. But self-isolation is not so easy.

YOU MUST:

- **NOT leave your home for any reason – if you need food or medicine, you must order them by phone or online, or ask someone else to drop them off at your home**
- **NOT have any visitors, including friends or other family who do not normally live with you, in your home**
- **MINIMISE all non-essential contact with other members of your household. This is VERY important if ALL other members of your household are NOT self-isolating with you. As every day they come home from work, they may have been infected with COVID-19 and with contact with you at home, pass COVID-19 on to you. SO the whole household has to take extra care to keep you safe**
- **WASH your hands often, AND avoid touching your face unless you have just washed your hands.**

You can use your garden, if you have one. Any exercise should be taken at home. If other people are in the house and not self-isolating with you, assume any surface, such as table, banister etc may have virus on them. Virus on your hands is not a problem – unless you touch your face BEFORE you have properly washed your hands.

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, you must let us know. We will not admit you to hospital until you have made a full recovery from any infection, and that would be a minimum of 7 days from the start of your symptoms.

If a household member develops any symptoms of COVID-19, then you must let us know also. You would then need to continue your own self-isolation for a further 14 days from the start of their symptoms. So as you can see, self-isolating is NOT easy; but it is essential that you follow these rules if you want to come into hospital at present.

Can you not test me to see if I have COVID-19?

In addition to taking your temperature, we could do a nose/throat swab, and we could do a chest x-ray or a CT scan of your chest. If these tests for COVID-19 are positive – your operation will be POSTPONED. We will monitor you until you are free of COVID-19 and reschedule your operation.

Unfortunately these tests are not reliable. A negative result can still mean that you may have infection with COVID-19.

Can I catch COVID-19 once I am in hospital?

Yes, unfortunately you can catch COVID-19 during your time in hospital. We will do our best to keep you as safe as possible. Our staff follow all of the guidelines about regular hand washing, social distancing, extra cleaning in the hospital and the use of PPE (personal protective equipment) to reduce the chance of infection between staff and patients. Unfortunately, to reduce the chance of spreading infection in the hospital means that you will not be able to have any visitors.

You may decide with your doctor that you would prefer to delay your surgery. Please feel free to discuss that with the hospital team looking after you. Your team will discuss with you the risks of proceeding with surgery at this time of COVID-19, and the risks of delaying your operation until the coronavirus pandemic is over.

We know that this is a very worrying time for you and your family; but we want to be sure that we all understand the risks properly, and decide together what is the right course of action.