

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – information for children, young people and families from the Rheumatology team

We understand that you might be worried about coronavirus – also known as COVID-19 – particularly if your child has a long-term health condition, such as arthritis, lupus, myositis, vasculitis, uveitis or other rheumatology condition. This information sheet from the Rheumatology team at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) sets out our advice for children and young people who use our services.

Please read this alongside our general FAQs for families at gosh.nhs.uk/covid-19-FAQ. You can also find the latest news, information and resources in our COVID-19 information hub at gosh.nhs.uk/coronavirus-hub.

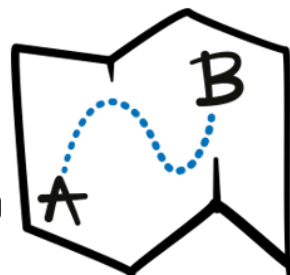
This guidance aligns with that of the British Society of Rheumatology and the British Society of Paediatric and Adolescent Rheumatology, and has been approved by the clinical team at GOSH.

Does COVID-19 affect children?

Although children do develop COVID-19, very few children will develop severe infection with COVID-19, even if they have an underlying health condition.

At the start of the pandemic, it was thought that some children and young people with rheumatology conditions may be at higher risk because of COVID-19, specifically those on immunosuppressive medication. This was a sensible and safe approach based on the evidence at the time. You may have been advised by the NHS and your clinical team to 'shield' your child.

As of 10th November 2020, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) updated their guidance for children and young people with rheumatology conditions. This advice has changed because of evidence that has become available from across Europe. **We now know that the majority of immunosuppressed children are NOT at higher risk, which is very reassuring.** There is no evidence that children and young people with rheumatological or inflammatory eye conditions (like uveitis) are more likely to be infected with COVID-19 than those without. If children and young people with rheumatological or inflammatory eye conditions do become infected with COVID-19 there is no evidence that they will become more unwell compared to other children. This advice includes those on immune suppressing medications. **Our advice therefore is paediatric rheumatology and paediatric ophthalmology patients do not need to shield and should attend school in**



accordance with government advice. In other words, children and young people with rheumatology conditions are no longer considered to be 'extremely clinically vulnerable'.

You can find special guidance from GOSH on what shielding means for child and family at gosh.nhs.uk/covid-19-and-vulnerable-children. You can find further guidance on shielding at nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus.

Find more information about which rheumatology patients require shielding on the RCPCH website at www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-shielding-guidance-children-young-people#children-who-should-be-advised-to-shield.

If your child has any additional or new medical problems, please seek advice from the other clinical teams involved in their care.

You can also access urgent medical advice by calling NHS 111 or using the online service at 111.nhs.uk. However, if you are very worried about your child or you feel their life is at risk, you should call 999 or take them to A&E or an urgent care centre as you normally would.

Specific advice about medicines from the Rheumatology team

It is very important that your child continues to take their medication as prescribed. Not taking it could make their condition worse. Please consult your specialty team before making any decisions regarding your child's medication.

Please remember patients on long-term glucocorticoids (steroids, prednisolone) should not stop these suddenly. If you and your clinical team

are planning for your child to start or switch to a new medication, this may now be reviewed. We will contact you to discuss any changes. Some medications are being switched from infusion to injection to allow them to be given at home.

If you think your child may have an infection, contact your clinical team to let them know. Immunosuppressive therapy may need to be paused for the duration of the infection and until they feel well. This will be done in careful consultation with their rheumatology team. This may mean that infusions or treatments are postponed until they feel better.

Should we make alternative clinic appointments?

Our clinical teams are looking at each patient carefully to work out which clinics and consultations can be done another way such as through video or phone calls, which appointments, procedures and admissions can be rescheduled safely, and which patients absolutely need to come into hospital.

If your child has an upcoming clinic appointment, we will be in touch with you to discuss how we can best carry this out. This may mean your child is offered a telephone appointment or video consultation. If your child is unwell and needs to be seen in person, we are here to support you and can arrange for the Rheumatology team to see them at GOSH.

As we have started to re-open our services, we are prioritising children and young people who need our care most urgently. We understand that some families may be worried about visiting GOSH, but if we book a face-to-face appointment at the hospital, it's because we think it's important that your child is seen.

Further information and support



Advice for rheumatology patients

www.versusarthritis.org/news/2020/march/coronavirus-covid-19-what-is-it-and-where-to-go-for-information/

www.ccaa.org.uk/coronavirus-support-resources/

<https://www.rheumatology.org.uk/News-Policy/Details/Covid19-Coronavirus-update-members>

<https://www.ccaa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/School-Reopening-Paed-Rheum-Opthal-Advice-FAQs-final-12062020-002.pdf>

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-shielding-guidance-children-young-people#sb-site>

General advice and support

Information from the NHS at www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/

Information from Royal College Paediatrics and Child Health for parents and carers at www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-resources-parents-carers

Information for children is available on the BBC Newsround website at www.bbc.co.uk/newsround

