

## COVID-19 and Day-to-Day Life: making decisions about your risk of exposure

### Who is this information for?

This document was written for people being treated in the haematology and oncology departments. If you have been treated for cancer or another haematology condition, you might be at increased risk of infection because of your illness or as a result of your medical treatment. You may also be at risk of serious complications if you develop COVID-19.

This document might also be useful for you if you have reduced immunity for other reasons. Talk to your doctor if you are concerned about your immunity.

### Introduction

The NHS England guidance states that people who have been shielding can begin to resume normal activities, socialise with other people and return to work. You will find the up-to-date guidance on the website listed at the end of this document. However, we know that many of you remain anxious about the continued risk of exposure to COVID-19. We know that shielding may have had an impact on your mental and physical wellbeing, and that it will feel good to be able to go out, exercise, and see other people. We also know that resuming some of your normal activities might be worrying. We have written this document to help you make informed choices about the safety of your daily activities.

Remember: there is no such thing as a completely safe activity. Any activity will have some risk. This document is intended to help you decide whether or not you feel an activity is safe for you.

**You should always follow the advice of your specialist healthcare team.** Please contact a member of your health care team for advice about your individual immunity and what is safe for you.

This document includes:

- information about the transmission of COVID-19
- a list of questions to ask yourself about any activity
- a list of questions to ask about your workplace
- information about individual risk factors
- a list of activities that have been rated according to risk. These ratings have been reviewed and agreed by clinical staff with expertise in looking after patients with weakened immune systems

### About transmission

The risk of an activity depends on whether that activity increases the chance of you catching the virus. The main way that it is spread is by droplets. Droplets are very small drops of liquid carried from your body when you breathe, speak cough or sneeze. They are spread in two main ways.

Firstly they may be carried in the air, particularly if the infected person is coughing. Airborne droplets fall to the ground soon after leaving the body so it is unlikely that you can catch COVID-19 if you are more than 2 metres away from someone carrying the infection. There is also a risk of breathing in airborne droplets from people closer than 2 metres away. We think that this risk is reduced if the infected person is wearing a face covering.

The second main route of infection spread is by droplets making contact with the skin, especially on the hands. If someone gets the virus on their hands then they may pass it into their mouth or nose if they touch their face. This may lead to the development of infection. In order to reduce the risk of catching infection in this way it is vital to wash your hands. The virus is killed by soap. Alcohol hand sanitiser is also effective, as long as it has over 60% alcohol.

Viral particles may also survive on solid surfaces outside the body, such as door handles or packaging. These viral particles potentially may remain

infective for a few days so might be spread if people touch infected surfaces with their hands. We do not know how often the virus is spread from infected surfaces. As far as we know, there is only a small risk of becoming infected in this way. However, regular handwashing is the best way of reducing this risk. Surfaces may also be cleaned using detergents.

It is thought that the virus lives for different lengths of time on different surfaces.

We do not know how long it remains on clothing and other fabrics. Face coverings should be washed daily after use.

#### To help keep yourself safe:

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol gel.
- Stay 2 metres away from people that you don't live with.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a face covering when it is difficult to maintain social distancing.
- Avoid public transport.
- Regularly clean surfaces that other people have touched.
- Wash clothing and face coverings at the highest temperature for that fabric.

### Individual risk factors

The overall risk of any activity will be different for different people.

You should consider your own risk factors when making decisions about different activities. Your risks of developing severe complications of COVID-19 will depend on:

- your underlying illness (and other medical conditions such as lung conditions, heart problems, diabetes or obesity)

- your age – older people are at greater risk from COVID-19 and this risk rises over 55 years of age and is particularly high in patients over 70 years
- your treatment history – what treatment you had, and when you had it
- your gender- men are more badly effected by COVID-19
- your ethnicity – people from the BAME communities are at greater risk
- your living environment, such as whether you are in a confined or crowded space and whether the people you live with are 'shielding' with you.

You might have been provided with information about avoiding infection during cancer treatment. This information will also help you to keep safe from COVID-19. Ask your specialist nurse for information about this.

It is also important to be aware of the symptoms of COVID-19. That way you can get advice as soon as possible. You will find the latest information about this on the websites listed at the end of this document.

You should talk to your GP or hospital doctor or specialist nurse to help you understand your individual risk factors.

## Questions to ask about individual activities

To help you make a decision about the risk of a particular activity, it might help to ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the activity involve other people? Do you know these people? Can you discuss with them in advance whether they have any symptoms of COVID-19 infection including fever, persistent cough and loss of smell or taste? Will these people be able to respect social distancing?
- Will other people be using face coverings?
- Does the activity involve younger children who might find it difficult to stay 2 metres away?
- Will it be easy for you to ensure social distancing of 2 metres? Try to consider things that could happen to make this more difficult, for example, if you were meeting outside and it started to rain. Make plans for these events that make it possible to continue safe social distancing.
- Does the activity involve sharing items with other people? Avoid handling plates, cups or bowls of food that have been touched by someone else. Do not touch things that other people have used, such as a petrol pump or a gate on a footpath, unless you can immediately sanitise your hands afterwards with an alcohol gel.
- Does the activity take place outdoors or indoors? Outdoor activities are lower risk.
- If people come into your home will they be using your bathroom? If this is the case provide a separate towel and wipe down surfaces appropriately after use.
- Is the activity for a short or one-off time period? Or is it something that is repeated over and over? The longer the period of exposure then the greater the risk.

To help keep yourself and others safe:

- Assume that everyone else has coronavirus.
- Act like you have the virus and you don't want to pass it on to anyone else.

## Questions to ask about your workplace

Some people might be considering returning to work. Your employer must take steps to make your workplace as safe as possible if you are not able to work from home.

To plan your return to work, you should meet with your manager to complete a risk assessment. This will look at what sort of work is safe for you to do. It may be possible to make changes to your usual work to ensure that you avoid unsafe activities.

You might also want to ask yourself the following questions:

- It is possible to maintain social distancing at work, including areas where people eat and drink?
- Has the workplace made changes to help people work at a safe distance from each other? For example, are there signs or marks on the floor to ask people to stay 2 metres apart? Are there screens in place if people have to work close together? Are there one-way systems in tight spaces like stairwells?
- Are there enough bathroom facilities?
- Will you have access to hand washing facilities or hand sanitiser?
- Will your colleagues be wearing face coverings if they are indoors?
- Are you able to open windows? This lowers the risk.
- Is the workplace cleaned regularly?

It might be difficult to make your workplace completely safe. But these questions could be used when you have your risk assessment with your manager, to suggest some changes that might be put in place.

### Example activities

These activities were suggested by members of a patient panel. The risk level was agreed by a group of doctors experienced in looking after patients with weakened immune systems.

**1 amber light = lower risk score**

**5 amber lights = higher risk score**

#### Meeting with family and friends

Adult visitors but remaining outside in garden



Risk Score

2

Young grandchildren to visit in the garden



2

A visit from elderly relative



3

Paying a visit to parents / grandparents inside their home.



3

Visiting people who are also shielding in my home / outside



1

Seeing somebody that you don't know well from 2m away



2

Two friends round for tea or a barbecue



3

Attending a funeral



5

Attending a wedding



5

#### Shopping and leisure activities

Going to the supermarket



4

Going to an outdoor market



3

Going to another non-essential indoor shop



4

Visiting a pub / restaurant



4

Getting a takeaway meal



2

Click and collect groceries



1

Going to a petrol station



2


Going to the barber or hairdresser



4

### Family life and schooling

Very young child returning to nursery  4

Young child returning to school (i.e., young enough that social distancing is difficult)  4

Teenager returning to school  3

Nanny coming into house to look after children  3

Children going to a childminder's house  3


Adult child living at home attending university  3

### Working

Partner/housemate/parent returning to work  3

Patient returning to work which deals regularly with the public  5


Patient working from home  1

Patients returning to work in an office where social distancing in place  3

Attending a job interview  2

### Exercising

Going for a walk or cycle in local urban area  2

Driving to countryside for a walk alone, with those I live with, or with others 2m apart  1

Playing socially distanced sport e.g., golf  1

Swimming in an indoor public pool  4

Swimming in an outdoor public pool  3

Going to the gym  5

Going for a bike ride along quiet country lanes  1

Walking the dog in spacious outdoor areas e.g., fields or woodland  1

## Medical and Dental


Going to the dentist  3

Non-urgent medical appointments e.g., cervical screening  3

Taking pet to vet  3

## Other

Putting house on market (i.e., people coming for viewings)  3

Having people visiting house to work e.g., gardener, plumber, decorator, cleaner  3

For more information:

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

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care/about-covid-19/>

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

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