

# Advice for People with Asthma (adults and children) in relation to COVID-19

Coronavirus causes an infection called COVID-19 that affects peoples' lungs. Most people recover from this at home but some need hospital admission for treatment of complications.

## How does having asthma affect my reaction to the coronavirus?

For most people, having asthma does not increase the risk of catching coronavirus or developing complications due to COVID-19.

## What does COVID-19 do to people with severe asthma?

People with severe asthma:

- Need frequent courses of steroid tablets to manage their asthma symptoms or may be taking steroid tablets every day
- Are usually under the care of specialists and may be on injected medicines for their asthma (Omalizumab, Mepolizumab, Benralizumab, Reslizumab, Dupilumab)

If you have severe asthma, you may be at higher risk of developing more serious complications from COVID-19 and social distancing (along with other measures to avoid catching the virus such as regular hand washing) is even more important.

## What can I do to keep myself healthy?

The best way of ensuring you stay healthy and recover rapidly if you get COVID-19 is to take all measures to ensure that your asthma is as stable as possible. This means taking inhaled steroids (preventer inhalers) and other routine medications regularly, as prescribed and detailed in your personal asthma action plan. Make sure you have a reliever (e.g. Ventolin) inhaler in case your asthma gets worse. These medicines do not increase your risk of getting COVID-19. If you have not had your inhaler technique checked recently, find your device at <https://www.asthma.org.uk/advice/inhaler-videos/>

As the number of cases of COVID-19 is increasing, it is natural for some people to feel concerned or anxious. Strong emotions can trigger an asthma attack. Please try to take steps to help yourself cope with stress and anxiety (<https://www.mind.org.uk/coronavirusoutbreakmentalhealthtips/>)

## Do the steroids in my inhalers lower my immune system and put me at increased risk of COVID-19?

No. It is important that you continue with your steroid inhaler and not make any changes to your treatment, unless you are asked to do so by a healthcare professional.

## What about steroid tablets (Prednisolone)?

At the moment we are not sure what effect oral steroid tablets (prednisolone) have on COVID-19 development or recovery. They are not currently prescribed as part of the treatment for this illness and starting them to 'protect' your lungs is not recommended.

If you currently take steroid tablets every day:

- Please continue to do so as the effects of stopping them suddenly can be harmful.
- If you become unwell (for any other reason) please remember the 'sick day rules' and increase your steroid tablet dose appropriately (usually the dose is doubled).

### **What about asthma attacks (exacerbations)?**

If you are having an asthma attack (exacerbation) it is very important to bring it under control and you should take your medication as advised by your personal asthma action plan. This might mean taking a course of steroid tablets. If you have severe asthma we recommend you have a short course of steroids at home ready to take when you need them. Antibiotics are only needed if your sputum (phlegm) changes colour, thickens or increases in volume.

### **How do I know if it's my asthma symptoms or if I have COVID-19?**

COVID-19 can present with symptoms similar to an asthma attack such as cough and shortness of breath. However, it is uncommon to get a high temperature with an asthma attack so that can help tell which you are experiencing. If you have a cough and fever, but are not unwell enough to need hospital treatment, you should self-isolate at home (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>) and follow your asthma action plan. If you have severe asthma and become unwell due to COVID-19 please inform your hospital asthma team.

### **What about my medicines?**

Please make sure you have a sufficient supply of your medicines at home and order them in plenty of time so that you do not run out. Some people with severe asthma take injected medicines (Omalizumab, Mepolizumab, Benralizumab, Reslizumab and Dupilumab). We don't think these medicines increase the risk of catching COVID-19 and might actually help to protect you by helping to control your asthma. If you are receiving asthma injections, your asthma team may organise for you to receive the injections at home.

Very few people with asthma need to use a nebuliser outside of hospital- in fact, it is discouraged because using salbutamol through a spacer can be as effective. If you have been prescribed a nebuliser, please continue to use it as directed. There is no reason to think the mist from a nebuliser increases the spread of coronavirus to other people.

### **Should I still attend my appointment?**

Many routine appointments are being cancelled or changed to telephone/video consultation rather than face-to-face. Please check before you go to the hospital. If you have a face to face appointment (e.g. to receive your asthma injection) and suspect you may have COVID-19, please self-isolate, inform the hospital team and do not attend the appointment.

### **Should I have the pneumonia vaccine?**

The pneumonia vaccination will not protect against COVID-19. Currently there is no vaccination available to prevent COVID-19 infection.

### **Where can I get more information?**

- Might I have coronavirus? <https://111.nhs.uk/COVID-19/>
- Information about asthma and COVID-19: (<https://www.asthma.org.uk/coronavirus>)
- Information for people with other lung problems: (<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus>)
- For advice on COVID-19: (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>).