Information for patients receiving planned hospital care during the coronavirus pandemic

The NHS is now able to restart services that had been paused due to the coronavirus pandemic. You have been sent this leaflet as your hospital treatment or operation has been prioritised, and you have been invited to come into hospital. Our aim is to enable you to undergo your treatment as safely as possible.

This leaflet covers the following topics:

- Steps we are taking to keep patients and staff safe in hospitals, page 1
- Risks you need to consider, page 2
- What we are asking patients to do, page 3-4
- Improving your physical and mental health before treatment, page 4
- If you decide not to proceed with your treatment, page 5

It is important you read this leaflet, and discuss it with your doctor or clinical team. If you decide to go ahead with your surgery/treatment, you will be asked to sign a consent form confirming that you have read the information, understood it and have had the opportunity to ask any further questions. A copy of the consent form you will be asked to read and sign in hospital is included at the end of the leaflet.

Steps we are taking to keep patients and staff safe in hospitals

We are managing the risk of infection to make sure that patients coming into hospital for planned care, and staff working in hospitals, will be as safe as possible.

Steps being taken include:

- We are separating/physically distancing, as much as possible, the facilities where we care for patients who have tested positive for coronavirus or who may have symptoms of coronavirus or have risk factors for coronavirus, and patients being treated for planned care.
- We are following national guidance for infection prevention and control and all staff are trained in how to limit the spread of infection in hospitals.
- Hospital theatres, equipment and wards are deep-cleaned regularly, in line with national guidance.
- The right levels of staffing and equipment will be in place so that your treatment or procedure can take place safely.

This means some services may be temporarily delivered in different locations and your treatment might be in a different place to where you were expecting. You may also see a different clinician or surgeon for your treatment than you expected. It may also mean that we may need to move your appointment or surgery date. We will always give you as much notice as possible of any changes.
When you are in hospital, most staff will be wearing some personal protective equipment (PPE). All staff are required to wear surgical masks in clinical areas unless they are exempt from this. All visitors and out-patients are required to wear a mask or face coverings in hospital buildings, unless they are exempt from this (please visit the www.gov.uk for further information about this). If visitors or out-patients do not have a face covering, a surgical mask will be provided. Some staff may also be wearing plastic aprons, disposable gloves, and face visors or safety goggles. The protective equipment may cover much of the person’s face (by a mask and a visor or goggles). Please do not be intimidated by it and do continue to speak to staff and ask questions as you normally would.

If you have hearing difficulties, and particularly if you rely on lip reading, please make staff aware of this so that they can make changes to how they communicate with you.

You can watch our video for more information on the measures we are taking to keep you safe and what to expect if you need to have an operation or procedure: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/how-were-keeping-you-safe

**Risks you need to consider**

There is evidence to suggest that there are greater risks associated with surgery in the following circumstances:

- You could have, or be developing coronavirus infection, when you come into hospital for your operation.
- You could catch coronavirus from one of the hospital staff or another patient.
- If you do have coronavirus when your surgery is undertaken or if you develop coronavirus symptoms, soon after surgery, your recovery could be prolonged and there is a risk of developing serious illness, possibly leading to a prolonged admission, re-admission to hospital, treatment in an intensive care unit or death.
- Your recovery from surgery could be slowed if you catch coronavirus in the first few months after your operation and may require re-admission to hospital.
- The availability of post-operative therapy and rehabilitation may be more limited than previously.

**What we are asking patients to do**

In order to minimise the risk of you becoming infected with coronavirus, and to ensure that we can protect our staff and other patients, we are asking all patients to do the following. It is very important that you follow these instructions for your health and the health of hospital staff and other patients.

**Before your treatment/procedure/operation:**

It is very important that you follow these steps, for your own health and the health of hospital staff and other patients, please ensure:

- You will need to stay home and self-isolate before the date of your treatment/procedures/operation. In some cases this will be for up to 14 days prior; for other treatments or procedures it will be after the pre-procedure coronavirus swab test has been taken. You will be informed of the duration of self-isolation required by your treatment team.
- Self-isolating means not leaving your home for any reason, even to buy food or medicine. Other members of your household are not required to self-isolate. However they should follow the UK Government national “Staying alert and safe” guidance, any local restrictions applicable, and the aspects of the self-isolation guidance applicable to household members.
- To help you maintain social distancing and reduce travelling to hospital you may be offered an online or telephone consultation before your treatment or procedure, rather than be asked to attend appointments in person.
- If it is felt to be clinically necessary for your care, we will contact you to arrange for you to be tested for coronavirus before your treatment/procedure/operation. We will confirm where and when this will take place and when you will be told your results.
- You must let us know if you think you have symptoms including a high temperature, new continuous cough, or loss or change in your sense of smell or taste, or if you or any of your household members have a current confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis or are currently waiting for a COVID-19 test result.
- You must let us know if you have travelled in the past 14 days to any country or territory NOT exempt from UK Government advice against “all but essential” international travel.
- You must also let us know if you have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus, or if you have been in isolation with a suspected case in the past 14 days.
- Your operation will not take place if you test positive for coronavirus or have risk factors for coronavirus, unless it is very urgent or considered an emergency by the clinical team.

**Travelling to, and while you are at, hospital:**

- We recommend that you come in private car, taxi or if you are eligible you can use the hospital's patient transport service. You may be able to get support from volunteers by contacting: www.goodsamapp.org/NHSreferral or call 0808 196 338.
  - If possible, please wear a face mask from when you leave your house until you arrive at the department. It is the law that you must wear a face covering when travelling in England on public transport, including in a taxi or private hire vehicle. You may also be asked to wear a face covering or face mark for the period of your treatment or stay.
- You should follow social distancing rules when at the hospital and make every effort to stay at least 2m from other patients and staff during your visit/stay. You will not be able to walk around the site during your stay, go outside to smoke, visit the canteen.
- The entrance or route you use to access the ward or department may be different to your usual route. Please check the signage and follow only the route indicated.

To reduce the risk of infection we are restricting visitors so you will not be able to have anyone come with you into the hospital, with few exceptions. Patients with learning disabilities that have a carer are permitted to bring one carer with them to the hospital. If you have any concerns, please consult our visitor policy on our website or speak with your team: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/visitors. While in hospital, our staff will help you to keep in touch.
with family and loved ones via telephone and video calls, and will able to provide them with updates on your treatments and condition.

**After your treatment/procedure/operation:**

We have put steps in place to minimise risk to you and others, following your treatment/procedure/operation:

- If you are admitted to the hospital, you will be tested for coronavirus, even if you have had a negative test shortly before your admission.
- If you stay in the hospital for a prolonged period, you will be tested for coronavirus every week.
- If you have been tested positive for coronavirus you will be cared for in a separate area of the hospital prior to discharge.
- If you are being discharged to a care home or hospice, we will test you for coronavirus before you leave the hospital.
- After discharge, you and all members of your household must follow the UK Government “Staying alert and safe” guidance. You and your household are not required to self-isolate after you are discharged. If you have had surgery, we advise that you keep contact with others to a minimum for four weeks to further minimise your risk of contracting coronavirus during your recovery. If you have been informed that you are in one of the groups who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19, follow the relevant UK government guidance: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19)

  - You should always follow all the instructions given to you on your discharge letter.
  - Follow up out-patient appointments may now take place over the telephone or via video consultation. Our staff will discuss this with you.
  - You may be able to get help with practical issues such as shopping or arranging for someone to check in on you or call you on the phone, if you are isolated. This can be arranged through your Local Authority’s support service networks or your GP surgery may have a ‘social prescribing link worker.’

**Improving your physical and mental health before your treatment**

Below are some steps you can take to improve your physical and mental health ahead of the treatment/procedure/operation, and to increase your ability to fight coronavirus.

- Stop smoking: even stopping smoking a few days ahead of surgery will increase the amount of oxygen in your blood, making your more resilient to the stresses of surgery and COVID-19 should you contract it.
- Exercise regularly and daily if possible: ideally brisk walking, cycling, electric-bike or jogging. If indoors, try moving in a different way, e.g. dancing, yoga or using a video/TV programme. Any increase in physical activity that makes you feel slightly out of breath will improve your fitness.
- Do strengthening and balance exercises: walk up and down the stairs, do squats and practice sit-to-stands to strengthen your muscles. The quicker you can move around after surgery the quicker you will be allowed to leave hospital.
Nutrition: people with obesity do worse with both surgery and coronavirus. If you have obesity or are overweight, try to lose some weight. Eating a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables will also maintain a healthy immune system.

Mental health: try to sleep well, and look after your mental wellbeing. Learn some breathing techniques, try yoga or listen to relaxing music. Read about mindfulness.

Alcohol: Try to stick to the guidance on daily alcohol units and have alcohol-free days.

Controlling existing conditions: if you have diabetes, high blood pressure and/or anaemia (low blood count), it is important to try and get these as well controlled as possible before your operation. You may want to discuss your medical conditions with your GP to make sure that you’re on the right medications.

If you decide not to proceed with your treatment
We want to assure you that our priority is delivering your urgent care safely. Risks of delaying urgent care can be significant. However, if you decide to delay your treatment, your team will contact you to discuss this with you, and will continue to monitor you. No one will be removed from the waiting list without their permission.

If you or your family/carers have concerns or have more questions:
Please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS):

The PALS team at Barnet Hospital
- Tel: 07929 790 604/07929 790 603 – Monday (9.30am-4pm) and 020 8216 4924 – Tuesday to Friday (9am-4pm)
- Email: bcfpals@nhs.net

The PALS team at Chase Farm Hospital
- Tel: 020 8375 1328 – Monday to Friday between 10am and 4pm
- Email: rf-tr.cfhpals@nhs.net

The PALS team at the Royal Free Hospital
- Tel: 020 7472 6446/6447; (020 7472 6445 - 24 hour answer phone)
- SMS: 447860023323
- Email: rf.pals@nhs.net

The following guidance for patients also has some useful information for people having an operation during the coronavirus pandemic:
Consent form for patient undergoing hospital treatment during the coronavirus pandemic

It is important that you understand that during the pandemic there is increased risk for your treatment/procedure/operation.

The journey to and from hospital and time spent in hospital may increase the chance of contracting coronavirus due to the increased number of contacts encountered. Steps have been put in place to keep contact to a minimum, however there remains an increased risk of contracting coronavirus.

Prior to your procedure, a member of the clinical team will discuss with you the following. You will then be asked to sign this form and return it to the member of the clinical team for your patient record.

The following items have been explained and discussed:

☐ We have discussed the available alternative treatments.
☐ I have read, and understood, the information leaflet that was provided.
☐ I have not experienced any coronavirus symptoms during the last 14 days and have been self-isolating as advised, if applicable.
☐ Neither myself, nor any members of my household, have a current confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis or are currently waiting for a COVID-19 test result.
☐ I have not travelled in the past 14 days to countries or territories NOT exempt from UK Government advice against “all but essential” international travel.
☐ I have not been in contact with someone with COVID-19 or been in isolation with a suspected case in the past 14 days.
☐ Coming to hospital may increase my chance of contracting coronavirus. This is due to carrying or incubating the virus while symptom free, or acquiring infection within the hospital.
☐ We have discussed the need for a coronavirus test before surgery. I understand that a negative test does not always mean a patient is disease free.
☐ The outcomes of coronavirus infection during my recovery period have been discussed. If coronavirus is contracted while in hospital, recovery from surgery could be more difficult with an increase chance of respiratory complications, serious illness or death.
☐ If intensive care support is required, this could involve transfer to another hospital.
☐ Visitors may not be allowed during my hospital stay, depending on the hospital policy at the time.

Patient name: Signature: Date:

Carer name: Signature: Date:

(if applicable)
Staff name: Signature: Date: