

Information for family and friends of patients admitted to hospital with COVID-19 (coronavirus)

Information for family, friends and carers

This leaflet is for family and friends of patients admitted to hospital with COVID-19 (coronavirus). Please read the following information to help answer some questions you may have.

You can visit the following link to download this document:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/COVID19-care-in-hospital

If you have a mobile device with a camera, you can scan the QR code below to get this document as a PDF on your phone:



What is COVID-19 (coronavirus)?

COVID-19 – also known as SARS-CoV-2 – is a type of coronavirus which is easily transmitted through droplets (ie by coughing, sneezing or touching your face). It causes mild illness in the majority of people who get infected, but can cause more severe illness for which people require hospital care.

If your family member or friend has been admitted to hospital it is likely they will need supportive care. This leaflet explains more about what that may involve.

Will my family member/friend be tested for COVID-19?

If your family member/friend is admitted to hospital, they will be tested for COVID-19. Testing for the virus involves having a swab taken from the back of the nose and the back of the throat. These tests can be uncomfortable but are essential to confirm the diagnosis. Results usually take around day to be processed. As well as this test, your family member/friend will also have some blood tests taken which will give additional information about their condition.

Can I get tested as well?

Testing is only currently available for those who are unwell and require hospital admission. If this changes, we will let you know.

Where will my family member/friend be cared for?

If your family member/friend is admitted to hospital and is suspected to have COVID-19, they will be admitted to a 'suspected COVID-19' ward or be put in a side room for isolation. If the test comes back as positive for the virus, your family member/friend may move to a 'confirmed COVID-19 ward' to receive their care. They may share a bay with other patients.

The place in which your family member/friend is cared for will depend on a few factors, such as their age group, how long their admission is likely to be and space on the wards.

How will my family member/friend be looked after while they are in hospital?

During their hospital admission, your family member/friend will have routine observations, usually by nursing staff and health care assistants. This will include checking their heart rate, blood pressure, oxygen levels and temperature. The team caring for them will decide how frequently this is needed.

Staff will help with cleaning, self-care and eating if they need assistance. Meals will be provided too.

Doctors will see your family member/friend daily as part of routine ward rounds. They will ask about symptoms and may examine them if needed. Blood tests will also be performed to monitor their condition.

Staff will be wearing personal protective equipment which includes an apron, gloves and a mask to help prevent the spread of infection. This is normal procedure.

Oxygen is the main treatment for COVID-19 and our decisions about your family member's/friend's care will be based largely upon their oxygen levels.

If their oxygen levels are low, they will be given oxygen. This might be through tubing that sits in their nose or through a facemask. Some patients may require more intensive oxygen therapy than what can be offered on the ward. If this is the case, they may be moved to the intensive care/treatment unit (ICU/ITU) for further support.

If there is a sign that your family member/friend has a bacterial infection, for example from their blood test results, as well as the viral infection, they may also be given antibiotics. Please remember, COVID-19 itself is a viral infection, and antibiotics do not treat viral infections so please do not worry if you are told that your family member/friend is not being given antibiotics.

What if my family member/friend doesn't speak English or is hard of hearing?

If your family member/friend has any communication needs, please raise this with the team caring for them.

Are there any other treatments for COVID-19?

As a research-led organisation, the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust is involved in clinical trials, including for COVID-19. If appropriate, your family member/friend may be asked to take part in a clinical trial. This will be discussed thoroughly with them, and their decision will always be respected.

Am I allowed to visit?

Unfortunately visitors are not allowed onto our wards until further notice, except in exceptional circumstances. We recognise this will be a difficult time for family, friends and carers, and appreciate your understanding and support in helping to keep our hospitals safe. We encourage you to use other methods of keeping in touch such as video and phone calls.

Patients receiving end of life care or who have a learning disability are able to have one visitor at a time, and usually only for an hour at a time. When visiting, you will be asked to wear personal protective equipment. In circumstances where a visitor requires assistance, two visitors will be accommodated and both will need to follow our visiting guidelines. Specific guidance and support is available for families and friends when they cannot visit and will be provided by the ward team as needed.

If you are in a higher risk group (age 70 or older, have underlying medical problems or are immune-suppressed), are unwell or are self-isolating, we will advise you not to come in to the hospital.

A visitor pass will be issued for this limited group of patients (one per patient). Visitors will need to present this pass on arrival to the ward. Please note, only one family member/carer at a time can use the pass, but it can be shared between families and carers to allow them to visit.

Visitors will need to report to the security desk at the relevant hospital to collect their visitor pass.

- Barnet Hospital: Main reception desk (passes will be available to collect from 2pm each day)
- Royal Free Hospital: Lower ground floor, next door to the emergency department (passes will be available to collect from 2pm each day)

When you leave the ward after visiting, you should not go to any other area of the hospital. Once home we advise you to wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds, wash your clothes and take a shower to minimise the risk of infection.

How do I keep in touch with my family member/friend?

We appreciate this is a worrying time for you and it will be difficult being unable to visit your family member/friend, but we will do everything we can to support you too.

If your family member/friend has a mobile phone, computer or tablet, they can use these to keep in touch with family and friends, using our free 'NHS WiFi'.

If your family member/friend does not have access to any mobile or electronic devices it may be possible to lend them one during their hospital stay via the Royal Free Charity.

We will also ask your family member/friend if they would like a someone to be involved in conversations about their care and treatment. We will ask this chosen individual to support us in keeping other family members and friends updated. We will endeavour to call on a daily basis and will definitely be in touch if there is a change in your family member's/friend's condition.

Family members, friends and carers can also send electronic 'best wishes' cards to their family member/friends through the Royal Free Charity: www.royalfreecharity.org/do/patient-support/best-wishes-service.

What can my family member/friend do while they are in hospital?

As mentioned above, your family member/friend can use devices to keep in touch with you. If they are unable to get out of bed or are not feeling up to moving, we encourage patients to rest and conserve their energy. When they start to feel better, we will remind them to keep active by sitting up and moving around the room. If they need help with anything, patients can press the buzzer and a member of staff will come to help them, as they should not leave their room, bay or ward.

Your emotional wellbeing

When your family member/friend is in hospital, it is likely to bring up many different feelings for you. As visiting is not possible at this time, we understand this will be a difficult time for you. In addition to looking after your physical health, it is important that you look after your mental health and wellbeing at this time.

We have listed a few online resources below which provide advice and further information on support services you can access. If you are worried about your own emotional health, or that of a family member/friend, you can also call the Samaritans for free on 116 123, talk to your GP or contact your local psychology service.

- **NHS**
www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services/
- **Every Mind Matters**
www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-anxiety-tips/
- **World Health Organization (WHO)**
For adults: www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2Ajh0hb_suFGdfooVK9IX4o96XYZFWxgaffGur63G6x4dJvskJfAWo7lw

For children: www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/helping-children-cope-with-stress-print.pdf?sfvrsn=f3a063ff_2
- **Mind charity**
www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing

- **Mental Health Foundation**
www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak

Your family member's/friend's discharge from hospital

Your family member/friend will be discharged from the hospital when they no longer require hospital care.

After seven days of symptoms, if they are feeling well, they may be discharged from hospital and deemed to be non-infectious. Once at home they can resume life as normal.

If they are thought to be well enough to go home before day seven after their symptoms started, they will be asked to self-isolate at home for the remainder of the seven day period.

In some cases, for example if they live in a residential, care or nursing home or they have carers at home, then the discharge arrangements may take longer. Staff will discuss this with you or them if applicable.

If your family member/friend continues to feel unwell after discharge from hospital, with shortness of breath or persistent fevers, then they should seek medical advice from NHS 111. If they are very unwell, please call an ambulance.

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