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University Health Board

This advice for rheumatology patients has been updated in light of the current Corona-virus pandemic.

We are receiving a higher number of calls and apologize that we cannot promise to answer every individual call. If you are showing any symptoms and you think you might have coronavirus (high temperature or a new continuous cough) or you've been in close contact with someone who has it:

- stay at home and avoid close contact with other people
- do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital
- No need to ring NHS 111, just stay at home for seven days.
- Only contact NHS 111 if you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition worsens, or your symptoms do not get better after seven days

In answer to the questions relating to rheumatology drug treatments we advise the following:

**Should patients cease their medication as a precaution?**

Some rheumatology patients, particularly those on steroids and biologics, will be immunosuppressed and should therefore be considered 'high risk'. All patients should however continue to take their medication unless they develop symptoms of coronavirus infection.

If patients are taking long term steroids / prednisolone do not stop these abruptly.

**Should patients who become infected with the virus cease their medication?**

If patients develop symptoms of any infection, immunosuppressive therapy including methotrexate, leflunomide, azathioprine, cyclosporine, mycophenolate and all biologic therapy (this includes all injectable treatment, tofacitinib and baricitinib) should be stopped for the duration of the infection and until they feel well. We would advise restarting one week after symptoms have gone. We do not advise stopping hydroxychloroquine or sulphasalazine.

Patients taking steroids or prednisolone should not stop their treatment and should continue on their usual dose.

**Unfortunately, based on current advice, we will be cancelling all routine new and follow up clinics until further notice. This situation will be reviewed daily. Where possible we will aim to carry out telephone consultations instead of face to face consultations and will aim to review those patients needing urgent attention for their rheumatological condition.**

Last updated Tuesday, 17 March 2020