

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Arrhythmia Frequently Asked Questions

Am I more at risk of contracting coronavirus if I have an arrhythmia?

You should not be more at risk of contracting coronavirus if you have an arrhythmia. However, it may mean that people with these conditions may have more severe symptoms and reactions to the infection if caught. This is because the virus can cause a drop in blood oxygen levels and blood pressure, which in turn causes the heart to work harder by beating faster to supply oxygen to the body.

Patients with Brugada Syndrome may be more at risk, as one of the symptoms of coronavirus is a fever, and these patients must do their best to avoid body temperature over 39°C. The fever must be treated with paracetamol and using methods to cool the body.

If a patient with Long QT Syndrome catches the virus and is admitted to hospital, they will have to be treated with care as some of the medications used can prolong the QT interval. This could in turn cause a serious electrical disturbance in those with Long QT Syndrome.

Which heart conditions are considered to be high risk?

- Heart failure
- Heart transplant
- Cardiomyopathy
- Coronary heart disease
- Atrial Fibrillation (AF) if you have other comorbidities such as diabetes, high blood pressure (hypertension) or heart failure
- Congenital heart disease

Who else is considered to be high risk?

- Those who are immunocompromised (have a weak immune system)
- Organ transplant recipients
- Cancer patients - both receiving treatment and those in remission
- People with lung conditions such as COPD, asthma or bronchitis
- Chronic kidney disease patients
- Diabetes patients

- Patients who have a condition affecting the brain including Parkinson's Disease
- The elderly
- Pregnant women with heart conditions
- People with a BMI over 40 (obese)

Those who are most at risk will be contacted by the NHS or the government. This list is regularly updated in line with new developments and research. For the most up to date information, please visit the NHS website at: www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19

Why am I at a higher risk if I have diabetes or high blood pressure and an arrhythmia?

It has become apparent through data collection that a large number of people who developed a more severe form of coronavirus had comorbidities such as high blood pressure or diabetes. This may be because both conditions are more likely in the over 70 age group, where the infection rate is also highest. It is imperative if you have these additional conditions that you make sure that you keep your blood pressure, glucose and cholesterol as tightly controlled as possible.

What should I do to lower my risks of contracting coronavirus?

The government guidelines on what we should do to avoid contracting the virus are as follows:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds regularly throughout the day, particularly after going outside or touching a foreign object or surface
- Keep a minimum of two metres distance from anyone that does not live with you.
- Avoid all non-essential travel
- Take precautions with hand hygiene when going to communal places such as petrol stations and supermarkets
- Avoid people who are unwell
- Avoid touching your face
- Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces such as door handles and light switches

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- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or into your elbow
- STAY AT HOME as much as possible
- Work from home if possible

Should I self-isolate?

Although we should all be staying at home as much as possible, you should stay entirely at home for 12 weeks if you are in the higher risk categories.

If you or someone in your home has displayed symptoms of coronavirus such as a cough, fever or chest infection, you should self-isolate completely for 14 days. Even if you only have mild symptoms, it is important to stay at home to minimise the risk of the virus spreading.

For further guidance on self-isolating, please visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice

Should I continue to take my medication as normal?

It is very important that you continue to take any medication for an arrhythmia or heart condition exactly as prescribed, unless advised not to do so by your doctor or specialist. It can be very dangerous to stop taking your medication or any other changes that you make without the guidance of a medical professional. It can put you at a higher risk of having complications of your condition and may cause a 'flare up' or worsening of symptoms.

If you have any questions about your medication or dosages, please contact your doctor.

Should I stock up on my medications?

There is no reason to stock up, as everything is being done to ensure that essential medications are available. In fact, it is damaging to unnecessarily stock up, and will create problems for other patients. Currently there are no shortages of medications. Everything is being done to ensure that the supplies of essential medications are maintained. There is no cause

for concern. The European Medicines Agency are monitoring the situation and to date have reported no shortage of essential medications.

What should I do if I think I have caught coronavirus?

The most important thing to do is to take a moment to evaluate your symptoms, and not to rush straight to hospital or A&E. This not only puts you at risk, but puts people around you and in the public at a much higher risk. Remember, some of these people may be very vulnerable.

Most symptoms of coronavirus and similar conditions (cold, flu etc) can be managed at home by taking paracetamol (NOT ibuprofen), drinking lots of fluids and resting. If symptoms worsen, or you start to develop warning signs, including, but not limited to chest pain, shortness of breath, an increasingly bad cough, palpitations or fainting, please do call 111 immediately. You may need to be examined or even admitted to a hospital or coronavirus facility.

I have an appointment scheduled; shall I keep my appointment?

Many hospitals and GP surgeries are rescheduling most appointments and some are changing to telephone calls. Appointments that are deemed to be most important will still go ahead. Do not cancel your appointment, or not show up without being instructed to do so by your GP surgery or hospital clinic.

Am I protected from coronavirus if I have a flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine will not protect against contracting the virus as it is a completely different type of virus. It will only protect against the influenza virus.

Can people catch the virus multiple times?

Although this is not known at the moment, preliminary research suggests that an immunity builds after being infected, which would mean it was highly unlikely to catch it a second time. This however could change once medical professionals

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and scientists understand more about this virus.

Is it safe to leave my house?

We should all be staying at home as much as possible, but we are allowed to leave the house for a few reasons; to shop for basic necessities, for food and medicine, which must be as infrequent as possible, one form of exercise a day, any medical need to provide care or to help a vulnerable person and travelling for work purposes, but only where you cannot work from home. Once we have left our houses, it is important that we maintain a minimum of two metres distance from anybody else, and practice caution when it comes to touching any foreign objects or surfaces. It is also important to get some fresh air if possible.

I feel stressed and anxious, what should I do?

Many people are feeling scared, anxious and stressed at this uncertain time, and we hope that we can help to support our friends and patients as much as possible. There are a few things that we would suggest to help you get through this time, particularly if you are self-isolating:

- Talk, talk, talk. Although we are working from home, we are still here for you. We are only a phone call, social media message or email away, and although our support lines have become increasingly busy, we will always return your call quickly. Technology has also made it easier for us to be in contact with our friends and family, a quick phone call or video call can make someone's day. If you know someone who needs company, reach out to them. If you need some support, reach out to others.
- Make sure you are still taking your medications exactly as they are prescribed for you. It can be extremely damaging to your health to stop taking any medications.
- Exercise! Currently, we are each allowed to leave the house to exercise once per day. Even if it is a gentle walk or taking your dog for a wander, do your best to get out of the house. Fresh air can make a huge difference

to how we feel, and exercising releases endorphins which makes us feel happier. If you do exercise outside of the house, be sure to keep a safe distance of at least two meters between yourself and other people.

- Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water and stay as healthy as you can.
- Eat healthily to keep up all of your essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Make sure you are maintaining your body's natural strength.
- Keep yourself busy, and don't read or listen to too much of the news. Although it is important to stay up to date with the current news from around the world, seeing too much of it can often cause more anxiety and feelings of stress.
- Use this time to rediscover passions and hobbies, you could read a good book, listen to music, catch up on that TV series you've been meaning to get to, take up knitting, practice yoga and meditation, there is so much to do to entertain yourself at home.
- Practice neighbourliness! Do you know of a vulnerable person who is unable to get to the shops or to collect their medication? Perhaps let them know that you are able to get small things for them as you are going, and make sure that you are there for support. Remember to practice social distancing at all times and leave their shopping at their door.
- Most importantly, unless it is necessary, stay home to protect yourselves, your loved ones, and all healthcare workers.

For regularly updated information, and to view videos from medical professionals regarding coronavirus, visit:

www.heartrhythmalliance.org/aa/uk/news/coronavirus-information-uk