



Centre for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases

March 31st 2020

Dear Patient

We want to talk to you, via this leaflet about COVID-19 (Coronavirus) about coronavirus. It's a scary time for us all. Like the rest of us, you are probably watching the news every night and feeling stressed about everything that's happening. You of course, have the added worry of wondering how it might affect your IBD, so we would like to take this opportunity to give you a few messages about that which hopefully might help.

First of all I want to thank you all on behalf of the team here at TUH. You're all playing an essential part in a massive national effort to control the spread of the virus and thankfully there are some signs that it seems to be having an effect, but now is not the time to be congratulating ourselves or getting complacent. We're not out of the woods yet, we're probably not even in the middle of the woods yet and we are about to enter the most critical phase. Keep knuckling down. Listen to advice from the government, the HSE and the Chief Medical Officer.

Secondly we want to apologise for interruptions in your IBD care.

Many of you will have had appointments, scans or scopes cancelled and we are sorry for that. The consultants in the IBD unit, are working really hard with all our other hospital colleagues and have had to divert much of our attention to helping fight this virus. Knowing we have your support in doing that is so important to us. The IBD nurses Helen and Liz are doing incredible work keeping the show on the road.

Please take a few minutes to read this short communique and keep safe.

Best wishes

Dr. Anthony O'Connor
Consultant Gastroenterologist & Clinical Lead for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases

There are five messages I want to give you to help you prepare at this time.

#1 Cocoon

If you are on any immunosuppressant medications, you should be cocooning, that includes Imuran, azathioprine, 6-mp, Purinethol, Methotrexate, Cyclosporine, Stelara, Infliximab, Humira, Hulio, Amgevita, Entyvio, Vedolizumab, or 20 mg or more of Prednisolone. If you are not sure what medications you are on, or whether they are immunosuppressant ask your pharmacist, or contact us.

Essentially, people in this category should not leave their homes at all, except for important medical appointments. You may still have to come to the hospital for blood tests, but we will minimise this while ensuring that they are safely monitored.

We know it seems harsh but you should not even go to the shops and you should not leave your home or garden to exercise. This is for your own protection. You should have no interaction or minimal interaction with other people. Ask your family and friends for help and if that's not possible you will find there are excellent community resources like Garda stations or your local community centre or GAA club. You can find more information about cocooning here <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html>



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If you are considered an essential worker, advice regarding cocooning may be difficult and seem hard to understand. The advice from the government is to contact your occupational health department. We will provide you with any letters or documents you may need to explain your condition. Luckily we have not encountered any employers who are unhelpful yet but we will be in your corner if you do.

If you are not on any of those medications, or are on less than 20mg of Prednisolone please very carefully follow the social distancing regulations that apply to the rest of the public.

#2 Stay on your medications

This is really important. The last thing we want to happen is for you to have a flare and become malnourished or need steroid treatment (both of which would suppress your Immune System more) or even require a hospital bed or surgery. The possibility of any of these outcomes increases when you stop your meds even if you've been stable for a long time. Don't do it. A small number of you who are on infusions who have high levels of the drug in your system may need to have them less frequently in order to keep you safe. If you are in this group we will notify you.

3 In an emergency, come to hospital

There are many other reasons for people to be sick apart from COVID-19. Specific to IBD you may still have flares that need hospital treatment. Especially if you're having large amounts of bloody diarrhoea, severe acute abdominal pain with fevers or a fast heart rate, you should still come to hospital. If you're not sure whether or not you need to go to the emergency department, try to contact the IBD team or your local GP. Don't feel bad if you need to come to the emergency department, you're not a burden, we'll look after you and if all is okay we'll get you home very quickly, but if you're seriously unwell with acute IBD the longer you leave it, the bigger the problem.

#4 Assemble your parachute

Think about what you might need in the coming weeks. Think about what you might need in order to cocoon. This includes food and medicines, but also things like sanitary products, toothpaste, soap, cleaning products and towels. Maybe some books and or an iPad might help you pass the days. Call in family, friends, community support.

If you have colitis and are advised to keep a supply of enemas for use in flares it's a good idea to know where they are and check they are in-date. Make sure you have the phone number and/or email for your IBD team.

If you haven't told people about your IBD before now might be a good time. The Irish Society for Crohn's and Colitis website is always a good place to get (www.iscc.ie) clearly written information on IBD. The Crohn's and Colitis UK website www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk has some very nice booklets aimed at the general public to understand what IBD is, and how they might be able to help a friend, neighbour, co-worker or relative who has IBD.

#5 Stay in touch

Email: IBD.Service@tuh.ie **Tel:** 01 414 3855. We try to get back to everyone within one working day but bear with us. As it goes on it is likely that some of our staff may have to take sick leave due to the virus too but we'll try very hard to keep service going as best we can.

Together we can limit the damage caused by this virus. Thanks and Stay Safe, Go Raibh Maith Agaibh agus Fan Sábhail.

