



Kidney Transplantation Service

April 8th 2020

Dear Patient

We want to talk to you, via this leaflet, about COVID-19 (Coronavirus). It is 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 kidney transplant and of how your immunosuppressing medications might affect you if you were to become infected with COVID-19. So, we would like to take this opportunity to give you a few messages which hopefully will help you and your families, and us as your healthcare providers, keep you as safe as possible.

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. Please listen and adhere to advice from the government, the HSE and the Chief Medical Officer.

Secondly, we want to apologise for interruptions in scheduled transplant outpatient care. Many of you will have had appointments, scans or blood tests cancelled and we are sorry for that. The consultants in the Renal Unit are working very 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. Our Transplant Nurse Specialist Maura, the extended nursing staff and our clerical staff 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. Frank Ward
Consultant Nephrologist

#1 Cocooning

As a transplant recipient on immunosuppressing medication, you are now advised to be "cocooning". 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. You can find more information about cocooning here <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html>

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 any letters or documents you may need to explain your condition.

#2 Stay on your medications

This is really important. The last thing we want to happen is for you to have an episode of rejection of your kidney transplant, which could lead to loss of the transplant function and the need to start dialysis therapy. Acute kidney rejection is managed by giving much higher doses of immunosuppression than you are currently taking, and this would result in your immune system being suppressed even further.



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There is a lot of information circulating on-line, on social media, on television and in the newspapers. Beware of “fake” news, particularly unofficial and anonymous social media posts claiming that various medications should be stopped or not used during the pandemic. In patients with **confirmed infection with COVID-19 only**, we may need to reduce the amount of medications that you are taking, in order to help your immune system fight the virus.

However, **DO NOT STOP** your medications, unless it has been clearly directed to do so by a medical professional involved in your own medical care.

#3 In an emergency, come to hospital

There are many other reasons for people to be sick apart from COVID-19. For kidney transplant recipients, other infections, such as urinary tract infection, and cardiovascular events are common problems that need hospital treatment. If you're not sure whether or not you need to go to the emergency department, try to contact the Renal Team on call or your local GP. Don't feel bad if you need to come to the emergency department – you are not a burden, we'll look after you and if all is okay we'll get you home very quickly. However, if you're seriously unwell, the longer you leave it the bigger the problem.

#4 I have symptoms concerning for COVID-19 infection, what should I do?

The symptoms of COVID-19 have been widely advertised, and include fever, cough and shortness of breath. Guidance on the protocols to follow for anyone in the community, including transplant recipients, can be found on the HSE website or HSE Helpline (Tel 1850 24 1850). Reliable information can also be accessed from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre website at www.hpsc.ie/

If you are not urgently unwell, then you should contact your GP, who will arrange a COVID-19 test for you if deemed appropriate. Please contact the Renal Team to inform them that you are going to be tested, and also contact us again when you have received your results (as mentioned above, if you have a confirmed COVID-19 infection then we may need to make changes to your medications). Please note that COVID-19 testing cannot be arranged for outpatients through the hospital, you must contact your GP to arrange same, and please don't delay if you have concerning symptoms.

#5 Prepare for the weeks ahead

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 on family, friends and community support by telephone to see what support they can offer. They will be glad to help.

Prescriptions for immunosuppressive medications supplied by the hospital team, through the “high tech” prescription scheme, can be posted or e-mailed to your chemist by the Transplant team if you inform us by telephone.

#6 Stay in touch

Make sure you have the phone number and/or email of the Transplant Nurse Specialist and your GP to hand. The Transplant Nurse Office can be contacted at **Tel:** 01 41 44004 from 9am - 4pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and the Renal Secretary Office can be contacted at **Tel:** 01 414 2353 during usual working hours Monday-Friday. Answering-machine messages will be monitored and responded to as soon as possible. Outside of these times, the Renal Registrar (doctor) on call can be contacted through the Main Hospital switchboard, if necessary.

We try to get back to everyone within one working day, but bear with us. As it goes on we may find some staff 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 Sábh

