

Asthma Factsheet 4

Updated on 7 May 2020

Advice for people with COPD who develop COVID-19 symptoms

People with COPD should be reminded:

- To stay at home until they are no longer contagious in line with government advice.
- If COVID-19 symptoms do not go away after 7 days, get worse or they are having difficulty in breathing, they must call 111 for advice, or 999 should they need emergency care. It is vital patients inform the provider that they have COPD and that their symptoms are getting worse.
- That it is important to remember that a cough can last for several weeks after COVID-19 however they should seek medical advice if their symptoms persist or are getting worse.
- If they live with someone who has symptoms, they need to self-isolate for 14 days from the day their symptoms started. It can take 14 days for symptoms to appear. If more than one person at home has symptoms, then they need to self-isolate from the day the first person started having symptoms - (provided everyone in the household have self-isolated).
- If the person then gets symptoms of COVID-19 they need to stay at home for at least 7 days, even if that takes them past the end of the 14 days they have been at home.
- People should be advised to make plans should they need support with their daily routine.
- This may include asking family and friends in getting food, medication and other essential items should the spread of the virus cause significant disruption to their life or they get symptoms and need to self-isolate. If support is not available from family/friends or neighbours then individuals can be signposted to their country council website. Most councils have added contact details for community hubs for self-isolating households who have no support available. Alternatively, healthcare professionals in your General Practice Surgery or their local Community Pharmacist may be able to refer them to NHS Volunteers for the period of self-isolation.

The BTS guidance states:

- If person with COPD is unwell, they should contact 111
- Exacerbations – “People with COPD should continue to be treated with inhaled or oral corticosteroids according to NICE guidance. Note that the standard course recommended for AECOPD is 5 days only. There is no evidence to use or not to use oral or inhaled corticosteroids outside usual guidelines in COPD patients with COVID-19. Antibiotics should be issued only if suspicion of secondary bacterial infection.”



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- There is NO evidence for “just in case” antibiotics or commencing new prophylactic antibiotics.
- Where a person with COPD develops a new/increased cough or increased breathlessness, in line with previous exacerbations, people should take their rescue medication irrespective of the possible organism.
- People should be encouraged to contact their healthcare professional on initiation of rescue medication since people with COPD may find it difficult to differentiate between exacerbations and COVID-19.
- Before steroids are prescribed, it is important to advise the control of symptoms with increased bronchodilation, breathing exercises and pacing where appropriate.
- No routine rescue antibiotics or additional oral steroids are needed if a person is experiencing non-respiratory symptoms (fever, fatigue, myalgia).
- There should be NO alteration to advanced rescue-pack prescribing or stockpiling inhalers.
- To advise people with COPD to ensure they have a sufficient supply of their medication at home and support their local pharmacy and GP practice by ensuring they re-order their repeat prescription in plenty of time. REMEMBER to inform patients not to over-order or stockpile their inhalers and NOT to share their inhalers or spacers with any family and friends.
- It is really important for patients to have their inhaler technique checked regularly to ensure they receive full pharmacological effect of their medicines as well as to reduce side effects. This may be carried out through video consultation or people can be signposted to the following video to help them do this.
- You may wish to encourage people to use digital self - management tools as the patient can track their health as well as providing them with holistic management strategies. Alternatively, signpost people with COPD to credible online websites/resources such as the British Lung Foundation.

¹Self-isolation if you or someone you live with has coronavirus symptoms Available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/what-to-do-if-you-or-someone-you-live-with-has-coronavirus-symptoms/staying-at-home-if-you-or-someone-you-live-with-has-coronavirus-symptoms/>

²COPD and COVID-19 for Healthcare Professionals. Available from: <https://brit-thoracic.org.uk/about-us/covid-19-information-for-the-respiratory-community/#covid-19-and-copd-for-healthcare-professionals>