

Kidney Wales Community

19:30-20:30, Monday 30 March 2020

Q&A with Dr Mike Stephens

Consultant Transplant Surgeon, University Hospital of Wales

Key messages

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water!
- Don't wait for your letter from the NHS – evidence shows that shielding works, do it now and stick with it! You will significantly lower risk of getting the virus.
- If you are shielding, people you live with must stringently follow social distancing guidance.
- If you are shielding and a family member has to work, when they return home: wash hands and clothes immediately; keep work equipment out of the house; social distance at work and within your house; sleep in separate beds; use separate toilets where possible; and use separate towels and cooking utensils.
- Let your kidney team know if you have any symptoms and they will keep a watch on you
- Don't make any changes to your medication unless you are advised to do so by your kidney team
- If your kidney team ask you to attend an appointment at clinic, it is important that you are seen in person.
- Some outpatient appointments may be less frequent or may be conducted over the phone.
- Most of the UK transplant programme is currently on hold to protect the safety of patients
- People who have previously donated a kidney are not at higher risk of either getting the virus or having a more serious illness.
- Please take a look at the detailed [Coronavirus guidance for people with kidney disease](#), produced by Kidney Care UK.

Links to further information:

- People who are shielding will be able to request a weekly food box. If you do not have anybody who can help you, please contact your local authority. The letter from the NHS will tell you how to do this. See further information here: <https://gov.wales/get-coronavirus-support-extremely-vulnerable-person>
- Find out what [financial support is available for people affected by COVID-19](#)
- [NHS guidance on exercises to do at home](#)

About this briefing

This question and answer (Q&A) session held on Facebook Live on 30 March was about the Coronavirus (COVID 19) virus and how it is affecting the kidney community in Wales. This is a report of the questions and answers provided by members of Kidney Wales Community Facebook Group and Dr Mike Stephens, Consultant Transplant Surgeon at the University Hospital of Wales.

Four months ago, the virus didn't exist. It is therefore difficult to know how to manage it. COVID-19 is from the same group of viruses as the common cold and influenza, but it is more severe and because it is new, none of us have any immunity to it. The vast majority of people who get the virus, regardless of any underlying health condition, experience a mild infection like a cold, or no symptoms at all, and will recover completely. A small number of people develop a severe reaction, which affects the body's ability to get oxygen into the bloodstream and will require oxygen therapy. This small minority of patients in need presents a risk to overwhelming NHS resources.

In terms of the kidney community, transplant patients are more prone to picking up infections, due to the medication they take to suppress their immunity in order to prevent their body from rejecting the transplanted kidney. Routine care also needs to be provided to patients e.g. dialysis patients. We need to try to avoid picking up the infection in the first place, which is why shielding and social distancing are recommended for the kidney community. You are more like to pick up the virus in places where there are lots of coronavirus cases, including hospitals, therefore the aim is to keep people out of hospitals as much as possible. Outpatients will be called less frequently, in order to lower the risk of catching the virus.

1. How do you catch the virus?

You catch the virus by touching your face – eyes, nose and mouth. Handwashing is vital for slowing down the transmission of the disease. Wash hands regularly. Rub your hands until there are lots of bubbles on your hands and in between fingers. It is easy to pass on the virus, even if you don't have symptoms. Therefore assume everyone you meet could have the virus!

Evidence shows that shielding works, stick with it! You will significantly lower risk of getting the virus.

2. Should I still attend my transplant clinic appointments at the hospital?

It is really important for kidney teams to see people in early stages after transplant, particularly to take blood samples. Give the transplant team a ring and they will advise whether they definitely need to see you in clinic, or your appointments will be less frequent, or conducted over the phone. Transplant teams are assessing every patient's need on a case by case basis. Take the individual advice you are given – if your appointment is still there, it's important that you are seen by your transplant team. In Cardiff, the Transplant Clinic has been changed completely; patients come to the Unit, are checked for symptoms before they are allowed into the unit, they are then asked to gel their hands, go straight into a clinic room, have bloods taken. There is no waiting – you'll be seen immediately and then allowed to go. Your kidney team will minimise contact with you.

3. Urine infections can also cause a fever, how will I be able to tell if I have the virus?

If you have any symptoms that you are concerned about, let your kidney team know. Cardiff UHW has a 'watch list' of patients who are showing some symptoms but they aren't severe enough to go into the hospital and can be managed at home. A Consultant is responsible for phoning these patients regularly to give individual advice. If kidney patients need to be admitted to hospital for COVID-19, dialysis patients will need to be on the renal ward, others may be treated on general wards.

4. I have chronic kidney disease (CKD) stage 4, I am working at home with our three children, but my husband is continuing to go out to work. What precautions should we be taking?

CKD stage 4 doesn't put you in the category of highest risk where shielding is necessary, but follow the principles of social distancing. Minimise contact with family, and your husband must practice stringent social distancing. As soon as he comes home, wash his hands, change and wash clothes immediately and try to keep equipment used for work such as a lap top, out of the house, in order to minimise the risk of the virus within the house.

5. If I as the transplant patient, am well but someone in my household is showing symptoms, should I stay in the house with them?

As a transplant patient, the advice is for you to shield in any case. Shielding means minimising contact with others in the same household, keeping rooms well ventilated and staying away from family members. Don't share the same bed, don't share toilet (or if you need to, clean after every use), have separate towels and separate eating utensils. It is very difficult for families to do this but it is the best way to protect vulnerable people.

6. What about food deliveries for people who are shielding?

The advice is for a family member or friend to do the shopping for you. If this is not possible, phone your local authority and they will organise a delivery for you. See: <https://gov.wales/get-coronavirus-support-extremely-vulnerable-person>

7. I am shielding, why can I not go out for a solitary walk?

The rationale is that you can meet people and pick up the virus from surfaces that other people have touched. You can go into your back garden and sit on your front doorstep.

8. I am a dialysis patient and am concerned about why staff are not wearing masks. Why is this?

The guidance says that masks do not completely stop transmission of the virus. We may see some changes with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including masks and staff may wear them more in the coming days. It makes people feel more comfortable.

9. Information on the UK news seems to be for English people, rather than Welsh.

The same advice applies across the whole of the UK. Please take a look at the [Coronavirus guidance for people with kidney disease](#), produced by Kidney Care UK.

10. I have not yet received my letter from the NHS, when can I expect it?

The letters in Wales have been sent by Welsh Government, they have been a bit slow but are on the way. If you're a transplant patient you should be shielding, don't wait for the letter.

11. I had my transplant three years ago and am a keen runner, can I continue to run or walk?

Transplant patients are advised to shield. Advice is to stay in doors completely. Find alternative ways to exercise on the internet/TV e.g. Joe Wicks. Please do exercise, if you can.

12. I work full time but I am shielding due to medical advice. My employer said I am eligible to receive SSP only.

This is a medical request to stay at home, you should be entitled to receive a full allowance, but this will vary between company policies.

See UK Government advice on how to [Claim for your employee's wages through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#). This states that:

Employees who are shielding in line with public health guidance can be placed on furlough.

13. I have had a transplant, is there a way to be tested if I have already had the virus?

A swab test can determine if you have the virus at present. More and more are becoming available, but there is not a test currently to check if you have had it.

14. I am shielding on medical advice, but members of my family are key workers and have to go to work. How can we best protect ourselves?

Family members can continue to work and minimise risk through careful social distancing, wash hands, change clothes, trying not to touch other things in house, leave work kit outside of house etc. Some key workers have taken decision to move out of home.

15. I am shielding and have no family or friends to get food and other supplies. What should I do?

People who are shielding will be able to request a weekly food box. If you do not have anybody who can help you, please contact your local authority. The letter from the NHS will tell you how to do this. See further information here: <https://gov.wales/get-coronavirus-support-extremely-vulnerable-person>

16. I am a home dialysis patient, waiting for a transplant. When will the transplant programme re-start?

Most of the transplant programme across the UK has been paused. The reason is that patients are particularly vulnerable in the first weeks following a transplant and need to be seen regularly by their transplant team at hospital. With the expected staff shortages due to illness, pausing the transplant programme was the safest option. Other transplant programmes in France, Spain, Singapore have been paused. Some people will still have life-saving surgery if they would not survive without the transplant e.g. heart and lungs.

17. I am diabetic, have a leg amputation, have a transplant and have had pneumonia in the past. Am I at higher risk of dying?

Even for transplant patients, most people will experience a mild illness and will recover. However we do know that transplant patients are more likely to get serious illnesses. Some transplant patients in Cardiff have had the virus and are recovering. Be diligent with isolation – that's the best way to protect yourself.

18. Can prescriptions be sent to local pharmacies?

Your GP can arrange for this to happen so please contact them directly. Transplant medication is prescribed by different units slightly differently, so please contact your unit. Don't make any changes to your medication unless advised to do so by your kidney team.

19. My mother has had a transplant but continues to walk and cycle. Is this safe?

No, the guidance for transplant patients is to shield and stay inside the house and minimise contact. Consider changing to an exercise that she can do in the house. See [NHS guidance on exercises to do at home](#).

20. I have CKD stage 2 and other conditions, what should I do?

CKD stage 2 does not put you in the highest category of risk but speak to your GP about your other conditions and any individual concerns you may have.

21. Can tea cure or decrease the virus?

No!

22. I have been treated previously with Tamiflu, will that protect me from this virus?

No, Tamiflu does not work for this virus. No effective treatment or prevention has yet been discovered, but there are trials rapidly in progress.

23. If we have symptoms of COVID-19, where would we dialyse?

It depends on how unwell you all. Contact your kidney team directly if you have any symptoms.

24. If a vaccine is developed, would transplant recipients be able to have it?

I hope so. It is not yet clear whether the virus responds to a vaccine as vaccines work differently for different diseases. Some viruses like influenza change a little bit every year which means the vaccine has to change all the time too.

25. I have Lupus, will it be worse if I catch the virus?

I don't think we know enough about it to be able to answer that. I would be cautious and do everything to try not to get it.

26. Is there any specific advice for live donors?

Nothing specific. Live donors aren't at higher risk of either getting the virus or having a more serious illness. Obviously, it is sensible for us all to be practising social distancing (and even more relevant if you live with a transplant recipient).

27. I have had a double transplant and have a few other conditions all on the high risk list, and my partner has no immune system through her MS treatment. We have two kids and have all been shielding for a week. If/when they are allowed back in school, what is the best way to keep us safe from what they could bring back from school, if this is before the 12 week isolation is over?

I really don't think the children will be back in school in 12 weeks and definitely not before the risk levels are much lower. Sounds like you're doing everything right- stick at it.

28. I'm a transplant patient who has had sepsis. Am I more susceptible to the virus?

We don't know for sure but the best thing is to be really careful with shielding and this will keep your risk very low.

29. I am worried about volunteers driving patients when very few people have been tested for the virus....

It is challenging. I would assume everyone has it and avoid direct contact. In transport and other situations, you can't avoid being in an environment you don't know, try and avoid touching anything and definitely avoid touching your face. Wash hands as soon as you leave. Not perfect I know but try to keep risks as low as possible.

30. I'm taking my dog for one solitary walk a day. I'm wearing gloves and wiping my hands regularly with antibacterial wipes often. I live on my own and think I would go crazy without her, can I still do this?

Your dog will not increase your risk of Coronavirus, so it is safe for them to stay with you. The current advice is for you not to go out even to walk her. I know this is incredibly difficult though. Hand washing makes a big difference for all situations

What you said about this Q&A session....

"Thanks so much to you guys and Mike for doing this. It has made a very stressful time a little less so 🌈💜💙❤️"

"That's great, thanks for the advice Mike, keep up the great work you're all doing in UHW & most importantly keep safe!! 👍👏"

"Thank you so much Dr Stephens. Thank you for answering my question about running.....I've been doing PE with the body coach, Joe Wicks instead (child's version) and it's pretty difficult so keeping me fit & occupied in the absence of my running training 😊👏 Thank you so much for this Q&A - really helpful 😊"

"Re-assuring and informative. Much appreciated by all."

"Thank you so much for your time, as a worried wife of a dialysis patient you have answered so many questions and made a huge difference. Much more positive, thank you."

"Thank you Mike, safest we've felt in weeks!"

"Thank you for the last hour Dr Mike, for your time and patience along with your straightforward, honest answers. They were greatly appreciated."