Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for people living with diabetes and their families

If you have diabetes, you are at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) and according to current government guidance you should be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures, including significantly limiting face-to-face interaction with friends and family if possible.

1. Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough.
2. Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible.
3. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to employer guidance for more information.
4. Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs
5. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.
6. Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services.

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of:
- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature

If you have coronavirus symptoms, however mild:
- Do **not** go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital.
- If you live alone stay at home for **7 days** from when your symptoms started.
- If you live with others and you or one of them have symptoms of coronavirus, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for **14 days**. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.
- Follow the advice of your GP, Practice Nurse or Diabetes team regarding your medication.
- If you routinely check your blood sugar at home you'll probably need to do it more often.
- If you don't test your blood sugar levels at home, be aware of the signs of a hyper (hyperglycaemia):
  - passing more urine than normal, especially at night
  - being very thirsty
  - headaches
  - tiredness and lethargy
  - IMPORTANT: You should contact your GP if you have hyper symptoms.
- Stay hydrated – have plenty of unsweetened drinks and eat little and often.

- If you have type 1 diabetes, check your blood sugar at least every four hours, including during the night, and check your ketones if your blood sugar level is high (generally 15mmol/l or more, or 13mmol/l if you use an insulin pump, but your team may have given you different targets). If ketones are present, contact your diabetes team.
- Keep eating or drinking – if you can't keep food down, try snacks or drinks with carbohydrates in to give you energy. Try to sip sugary drinks (such as fruit juice or non-diet cola or lemonade) or suck on glucose tablets or sweets like jelly beans. Letting fizzy drinks go flat may help keep them down. If you're vomiting, or not able to keep fluids down, get medical help as soon as possible.

If you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home, or your condition gets worse, or your symptoms do not get better after 7 days, then use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service. If you do not have internet access, call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999.

What should you do if you have hospital and GP appointments during this period?
The NHS advises everyone to access medical assistance remotely, wherever possible. However, if you have a scheduled hospital or other medical appointment during this period, talk to your GP or clinician to ensure you continue to receive the care you need and consider whether appointments can be postponed.

If you miss your annual diabetes review where your 15 healthcare essentials are checked you should be able to reschedule once normal service resumes. In the meantime, follow your current regime including checking your feet daily, keep to a healthy diet and try to keep active.

If you or your family need to seek medical advice
Seek prompt medical attention if your illness or the illness in any household members is worsening. If it's not an emergency, contact NHS 111 online at 111.nhs.uk. If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. If it is an emergency and you need to call an ambulance, dial 999 and inform the call handler or operator that you or your relative have coronavirus symptoms.

All routine medical and dental appointments should usually be cancelled whilst you and the family are staying at home. If you are concerned or have been asked to attend in person within the period you are home isolating, discuss this with your medical contact first (for example, your GP, local hospital or outpatient service), using the number they have provided. If your concerns are related to your coronavirus symptoms contact NHS 111 online. If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111.

For more information please visit
COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection

Coronavirus and your emotional wellbeing

You might be feeling worried and anxious about coronavirus and how it might affect you or your family and friends. We know this could be a stressful time, so you may need support with how you're feeling. We have some useful information to help you cope with stress and other emotions [link to www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/emotions], or you might like to call our helpline [link] or use our online forum [link] to talk to others.

Other Questions

The NHS website says the symptoms and complications of coronavirus can be worse in people with diabetes. Would I be more likely to die?

Coronaviruses can cause more severe symptoms and complications in people with diabetes, as well as in older people, and those with other long term conditions such as cancer or chronic lung disease. The risk of death from coronavirus is quite low, and the majority of people with coronavirus will have a comparatively mild illness.

It is important that people with diabetes follow the sick day rules should they become ill from any illness. If you routinely check your blood sugar at home, you'll probably need to do it more often – at least every four hours, including during the night.

If your blood sugar is persistently high or low, or if you have symptoms of a hyper contact your GP practice or Diabetes team by phone who will help you if you have any queries or if you are unsure about what to do regarding your diabetes.

What should I do if my clinician is diagnosed with coronavirus?

If your clinician is diagnosed with coronavirus and you have not seen them recently, then you are unlikely to have been exposed to coronavirus. The risk associated with any healthcare workers who become infected with coronavirus is assessed on a case by case basis and appropriate action taken. You should follow the advice given to you if you are contacted because you have been exposed to coronavirus in this way.

Q6 Should I go to work / not see friends / not see friends who've travelled from affected areas?

We recommend that people with diabetes follow the latest social distancing measures: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults.

What if I have travel planned or a holiday booked to one of the affected areas – am I more at risk if I do travel?

The Foreign Office has the most up-to-date information. As of 17th March, they are advising British nationals against all but essential international travel. Any country or area may restrict travel without notice. The most up-to-date information can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Family/friends/carers of people living with diabetes

I have been exposed to the virus and am a carer for someone with diabetes. What should I do?

We recommend everyone follows the NHS advice around reducing the risk of picking up infections including thoroughly washing your hands frequently, practicing good hygiene and avoiding contact with people who are unwell: www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/.

If you live with someone who has a continuous cough or a high temperature, you should stay at home for 14 days from the day the first person got symptoms. If you then develop symptoms, you should stay at home for 7 days from the day your symptoms start, even if it means you're at home for longer than 14 days.

If you have been in close contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, use the NHS 111 online coronavirus service.