

COVID-19 and cortico-steroid injections



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Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust
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Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for patients considering cortico-steroid treatment for pain relief. It explains the impact of COVID-19 on this treatment and the additional precautions required.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, treatments such as cortico-steroid injections were put on hold. This is because steroids can reduce the ability of the body's immune system to fight an infection.

We are now able to offer steroid injections again. We are doing this on a case by case basis. This is because some people are still very vulnerable.

Are there any alternative treatments?

Before you have a cortico-steroid injection your physiotherapist will discuss other, lower risk treatments with you. These include: simple pain relief, changing the way you do different tasks, exercises, rest and splints or supports. We will only consider a cortico-steroid injection if these other options have not helped you.

Your therapist may decide to use the lowest possible dose. If there are two problem areas (which we call a bilateral condition), your therapist will spread out the injections rather than perform them at the same time.

What are the risks?

If you were to receive a cortico-steroid injection while infected by COVID-19 but not showing any symptoms, this could put you at an increased risk. This may mean it may take you longer to recover or make it more difficult to recover from COVID-19. If you are one of our more vulnerable patients the effect could be much more serious. Sometimes it can take 14 days for symptoms of COVID-19 to show. Evidence varies, but the immune system can remain reduced after a cortico-steroid injection anywhere from 7 to 40 days.

Who is at increased risk?

If you were told by your GP surgery to shield then you are in the increased risk group. This includes people over 70, people with diabetes, heart disease,

chronic respiratory disease, high blood pressure and those with an already suppressed immune system. Your physiotherapist will do a thorough health screen with you to check there are no other conditions which may place you at heightened risk.

Before having a corticosteroid injection it is important to check:

- you are not displaying COVID-19 symptoms: have you had a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, loss or change of sense of taste / smell in the previous 14 days?
- have you had contact with any person who has COVID-19 in the previous 14 days?
- have you had a positive COVID-19 test in the previous 14 days?

What do I do if I develop COVID-19 symptoms after the cortico-steroid injection?

If you have the steroid injection and you think you may have COVID-19 symptoms it is important you follow the government guidance about self-isolating and self-treatment. See www.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19. You should visit www.gov.uk to arrange a test, or call 119.

We recommend you call NHS 111 and advise them that you have had a cortico-steroid injection and have COVID-19 symptoms. We will give you information on the name of the drug, the dose and date of injection. You need to give this information to NHS 111.

How do I look after myself following a cortico-steroid injection?

We advise you to reduce your risk of catching COVID-19 by following the current recommendations:

- limit contact with people
- keep 2 metres apart from anyone you do not live with
- wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds
- wear a face-mask if you can.

Avoid foreign travel for two weeks following an injection, and stay away from people if you know they have COVID-19.