

Patient information leaflet on steroid injections during the outbreak of novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

Patient Information

Some pain procedures involve the injection of steroid medication. In addition to the usual risks and benefits of a pain procedure or injection, there may be additional risks when steroids are used during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Please consider the information provided in this leaflet. You can discuss any queries with your consultant when you attend hospital for your injection.

What are the risks of steroid injection?

Steroid injections are associated with some known risks including pain, infection, bleeding/bruising, skin discolouration, and high blood sugar in diabetics.

There are also potential additional risks if you contract (catch) coronavirus around the time of an injection containing steroids.

Steroids and Coronavirus-Related Risk

Typically steroids reduce immunity (the body's ability to fight infection). Therefore there is concern that steroids can increase the risk of a person contracting coronavirus.

Unfortunately there is no hard evidence available on this. There is some evidence that steroid injections increase the risk of contracting flu viruses, but we do not definitively know whether this is the case with coronavirus. In fact, there is some evidence that steroids can improve survival rates in certain patients already infected with coronavirus.

This means overall there is uncertainty regarding the value or risk of steroids during the coronavirus pandemic.

Therefore, as a precaution, doctors are being advised to only use steroid injections when necessary and when other options have been tried. Your doctor should have explored and discussed alternative treatment options before you decide to proceed with a steroid injection.

Some people are at higher risk than others, such as those with certain medical conditions or those aged over 70 years. These risk factors will be discussed with you by your doctor when considering the risks and benefits of a steroid injection.

We have put in place measures to minimise the risk of patients contracting coronavirus before, during and after an injection. However there is no guarantee this can be totally prevented.

Please note:

- Coming into a hospital environment will mean you will encounter staff or other patients who could unknowingly be carrying coronavirus.
- Equally, you could be infected and not yet be showing symptoms. You may already be carrying coronavirus when you come in for your procedure and the steroid injection could then make you symptomatic.
- If you have coronavirus or contract this around the time of your treatment, an injection containing steroids could make your recovery more difficult, or increase your risk of serious illness, or death.
- You can reduce these risks by social distancing (see below).

When should I avoid a steroid injection?

You should not be given a steroid injection if you have an infection or if there is a possibility you may have coronavirus, or have been in contact with someone with coronavirus symptoms or a positive coronavirus test in the last 14 days. If you have symptoms that may be associated with active coronavirus infection (e.g. cough, fever, shortness of breath, change or loss of taste or smell) you should not have an injection and should cancel your appointment and seek medical advice.

What happens next?

When you attend for your appointment, precautions will be taken to protect you and staff. You will be asked to clean your hands and wear a facemask.

What happens after the injection?

Following the injection we advise you to continue to follow government social distancing guidelines strictly for 2 weeks afterwards to further reduce the risk of you getting coronavirus.

If you feel unwell following your injection, please contact your GP or local emergency department.