

Information for relatives

(Reproduced with the permission of the Intensive Care Society)

Your loved one has been admitted to intensive care with a severe chest infection (pneumonia) and we think this is due to the coronavirus (COVID-19).

We understand that this will be a very worrying time for you. We always try our very best to talk to you as soon as possible to help you understand the situation and answer your questions to try and make this time less frightening. We have produced this short message because our teams are facing such enormous demand that it may be some time before we are able to meet you. We hope that it will provide some clarity for you at a very difficult time.

There is unfortunately no treatment currently available that can influence the effect of coronavirus infection on the body. To recover from this infection, the body needs to defend itself against the virus and eliminate it, and then heal the damage the virus has caused. The virus mainly damages the lungs, making breathing very difficult, but sometimes it also affects the heart and kidneys.

The various forms of treatment we are able to provide on the intensive care unit (ICU) are supportive only. For example, a breathing machine (ventilator) does not fix or heal the lungs. It only makes breathing feel easier and more comfortable, providing support for the body to try to give the lungs a chance to heal. Importantly, if the lungs are already damaged from pre-existing disease then it becomes harder for them to heal if they are further damaged by this infection. This might also apply to the heart and kidneys, for instance, general frailty, or if there are other illnesses present, like cancer or diabetes.

We will do all we can to provide your relative with the very best and most appropriate treatment to help them to recover from their illness. But it is important to understand that this treatment might not be enough for your relative to recover from this infection. If this becomes clear, the kindest thing we could do then would be to focus on preventing your relative from being in pain or suffering, preserving their dignity and ensuring they are peaceful if they die. We will make every effort to keep you involved in and informed of any such decisions and keep them under regular review.

Whatever the outcome, at every stage we will offer them care, kindness and compassion, treating and looking after them as your loved one, the special person that they are.

Important information for you

If you have had close contact with your loved one within the last week, the current Government advice is that you must self-isolate for 14 days (please check: this may change). Please contact the NHS 111 website for further details. Also, the Government coronavirus website has advice on self-isolating, social distancing and how to access home help if needed, as well as suggestions on how to maintain your mental wellbeing:

<http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

These are exceptional circumstances and to minimise risks to you, members of the public and staff, there are unfortunately strict restrictions on visiting patients with COVID-19. We recognise how painful it must be not to be able to be close to your loved one at such a difficult time. We will do our best to stay in touch with you and make ourselves available to answer questions. We apologise in advance if we are not able to spend as much time with you as we would like.

Please telephone the Patient and Family Liaison Team on 0151 600 1768. The team are available 8am to 8pm 7 days a week and will do their utmost to help as soon as they can.

Looking after yourself

It is important to ensure you have as much support as possible for yourself, and that you take time to practise self-care. The 'Mind for Better Mental Health' website has general advice as well as information specific to coronavirus and is accessible at:

<http://www.mind.org.uk>