

The Patients Association  
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17<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Andrew,

I am writing to let you know that the Patients Association remains open for business during the coronavirus outbreak.

Our regular Patient Voice newsletter will follow shortly, but we are delaying it slightly while we evaluate what advice we need to include about coronavirus, and whether we need to make further changes to how we work.

In the meantime, I wanted to write to you with some brief but essential facts and advice about coronavirus (COVID-19).

### Essential facts and advice

The main common symptoms of coronavirus are:

- a high temperature
- a new, continuous cough.

If you have either of these symptoms you should stay at home for 14 days. If you live with anyone who has these symptoms, you should stay at home for 14 days. If you are living with someone who is unwell, avoid physical contact with them, as far as possible.

Please do not go to a GP surgery, pharmacy or hospital, or contact NHS 111 or seek a test for coronavirus.

In the first instance, seek advice and information online – <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>.

Call NHS 111 only if:

- you feel you cannot cope with your symptoms at home
- your condition gets significantly worse
- your symptoms do not get better after seven days.

If possible, do not go out to buy food or other supplies. Seek help from friends or family, and if you do see anyone, keep a distance from them (at least two metres / six feet). Seek medical advice by phone or online if possible, rather than visiting your GP. There are a number of support groups setting up locally to help those who need support to self-isolate, for example On Hand who can be contacted on 020 3488 2912 or <https://www.beonhand.co.uk>. Our helpline team are identifying local groups that are emerging for people to offer mutual support and can advise if there is one in your area.

Some people are at particularly high risk from coronavirus. This includes people who are aged 70 or older (even if they are otherwise well); instructed to get a flu jab each year, because of a medical condition or pregnant.

Some people with health conditions are at particularly high risk, and the NHS will be contacting them individually.

In order to slow and reduce the spread of coronavirus, the Government is advising everyone to undertake 'social distancing'. This means avoiding all unnecessary contact with other people, including non-essential use of public transport, gatherings in public spaces such as pubs, cinemas and restaurants, and gatherings with friends and family.

Guidance on handwashing and hygiene remains in place: wash your hands more often, with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use a hand sanitiser when you get home or into work, blow your nose, sneeze, cough, eat, or handle food. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home.

People at higher risk are advised to observe the guidance on social distancing and hygiene measures strictly.

### Contacting the Patients Association

We will be here to support our members and the public during this difficult time. Our helpline remains available to give free information, advice and signposting and will be up to date with the latest information. As mutual support groups develop, we will hold this information too. You are not alone so please ring our helpline for free on 0800 345 7115 between 9:30am and 5pm on weekdays should you need any advice, although please note that we are unable to provide any medical advice. Should an extension of these hours during this period be necessary we will endeavour to do so.

In line with official guidance, all our staff are working from home. Our usual contact numbers and email addresses remain in place, but we may not be able to access our post regularly while emergency measures are in place. We therefore cannot guarantee that we will be able to respond to written correspondence sent to us by mail.

Our systems for remote working depend on strong internet connections, which are in place. However, please bear with us if there are any interruptions to calls or other communication problems due to momentary disruption to broadband or WIFI connections.

Stay safe, I wish you all the best and thank you for your ongoing support for the Patients Association

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Power  
Chief Executive