
DIVISION OF DIGESTIVE CARE & ENDOSCOPY

Room 932, Victoria Building
1276 South Park Street
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Tel: (902) 473 6456
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To all GI patients and their families,

We have been receiving many questions from patients about risks related to the new Covid19 virus.

The most important response to the pandemic is to limit your exposure and the spread of the virus:

- Practice good cough etiquette (e.g. cough into your sleeve)
- Practice good hand hygiene: wash your hands with soap and water after social contact, before meals and often in between. Wash for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your nose, eyes, and mouth.
- The virus can last surfaces for days (phones, door handles, credit cards, communal computers, bank machines etc.), the best protection is to be vigilant with hand washing.
- Avoid unnecessary group situations such as social gatherings and visiting other people who are in a health care facility or long-term care residence.
- Avoid unnecessary travel on public transit, taxis, and ride-shares.
- Avoid individuals with flu -like symptoms.
- If you did not get your flu shot this year, please do - influenza is circulating in the community and, although this will *not* protect you against COVID19, the flu can cause serious infection.
- We advise *against* international travel for people with chronic illness and those taking immune modulating medications. Be aware that if you are traveling internationally and there are escalating infections in multiple regions and quarantines are being initiated with short notice. If you or a family member become ill while traveling, your return may be delayed until isolation requirements are met. Ensure your health insurance will cover medical care if required.

If you or a family member have ***symptoms of COVID19*** (shortness of breath, cough, or fever), call ***Health Link at 811***. They will do a phone assessment and coordinate screening at the most appropriate screening center. **DO NOT GO TO THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT** unless you are experiencing shortness of breath or chest pain then proceed to the ED or call 911 if medical support required.

If you live with someone who ***contacts COVID19*** isolate them to a well-ventilated room within your home with open windows and open door. If possible, have them use a separate bathroom. Maintain a distance of at least 1 meter. Limit to one young healthy caregiver if possible. Avoid contact with pets. Maintain a clean environment by disinfecting daily surfaces (bedside tables, bedframe, washroom, counters, linens and bath towels). Communicate with health link at 811 re symptom concerns and they will help in planning medical assessment and treatment.

If you ***develop a confirmed COVID19*** infection, please call the **IBD PATIENT HELPLINE at 902-473-4927** and let us know. We will provide further advice specific to your illness.

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Patients are asking about what to do with their IBD medications:

- Mesalamine medications (Asacol, Pentasa, Mezavant, Salofalk) are all safe.
- Immunosuppressant's (Imuran /azathioprine /tofacitinib) can inhibit the body's immune response to viral infections. The impact of thiopurines on the immune system take months to resolve. Stopping these medications would only be advised in the setting of a confirmed COVID 19 infection.
- Biologic therapies (Remicade/ Inflectra/ Renfexis/ Humira/ Entyvio/ Stelara / Simponi) are generally safe. We do not recommend interrupting treatment.
- Steroids (prednisone, hydrocortisone) may suppress the immune system and make patients more susceptible to serious infections. Clinical risk and benefit will need to be determined on an individual basis.
- Ensure that you have 90 days of your prescription medications available in your home.

Patients are asking about upcoming appointments:

- If you have an upcoming clinic appointment and you *feel well* but are uncomfortable attending your appointment, please contact your primary GI provider and we will try to arrange telephone follow-up where possible.
- If you have an upcoming clinic appointment and you are *unwell from your GI illness / IBD* we are still asking patients to attend their appointment as scheduled. We will be paying extra attention to infection prevention measures in the clinic.
- At this point we are not cancelling or postponing endoscopy appointments. We will be taking all necessary precautions to prevent the spread of infection in the endoscopy unit.

We will continue to update information as it becomes available.

The Nova Scotia Health Authority also posts daily updates at <http://www.nshealth.ca/covid19-news>