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## DIVISION OF DIGESTIVE CARE & ENDOSCOPY

Room 932, Victoria Building  
1276 South Park Street  
Halifax, NS, B3H 2Y9  
Tel: (902) 473 6456  
Fax: (902) 473 4406

To all GI patients and their families,

We have been receiving many questions from patients about risks related to the COVID 19 infection.

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

- ***STAY HOME AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE***
- Practice SOCIAL DISTANCING if you have to go to work, grocery store, pharmacy, etc.
- Practice good cough etiquette (e.g. cough into your sleeve).
- Practice good hand hygiene: wash your hands with soap and water after social contact, after a cough or a sneeze, before meals, and frequently between meals. Wash for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your nose, eyes, and mouth.
- The virus can last on surfaces for days (phones, door handles, credit cards, communal computers, bank machines etc.), the best protection is to be vigilant with hand washing.
- Avoid all group gatherings including social gatherings and work, if possible.
- Avoid unnecessary travel on public transit, taxis, and ride-shares.
- Avoid individuals with symptoms of a cold or flu.
- 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.
- Avoid international travel.
- If you work in healthcare, or any profession where interaction with the public/infected patients is possible, pay careful attention to proper use of Personal Protective Equipment.

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 1-2 meters. If possible, limit to one young healthy caregiver. 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.

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### *If you develop a confirmed COVID19 infection:*

- Follow recommendations from Public Health, including symptom monitoring, rest and hydration, and strict isolation for at least 14 days.
- If your symptoms become severe, proceed to the ED or call 911.
- Please call the IBD PATIENT HELPLINE at 902-473-4927 and let us know. We will provide further advice specific to your illness.
- If you develop COVID19 infection, we recommend the use of acetaminophen to manage symptoms. There has been some preliminary information that the use of NSAIDS (e.g. ibuprofen, Aleve, Advil, Motrin) may worsen the infection.

### *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) suppress the immune system and make patients more susceptible to serious infections and may make infections worse. The clinical risk and benefit will need to be determined on an individual basis in discussion with your specialist.
- Ensure that you have 90 days of your prescription medications available in your home.

### *Patients are asking about biologic infusion clinics:*

- Each biologic infusion clinic will be following their own pandemic protocols.
- We have been assured that the biologic infusion clinics are taking strict precautions to limit possible exposure, including:
  - Screening patients for travel and known sick contacts
  - Screening patients for signs and symptoms of COVID 19 infection
  - Taking patient temperature of all patients at the time of presentation
  - Spacing chairs by 6 ft
  - Continue to use robust cleaning protocols and proper hand hygiene

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***Patients are asking about upcoming clinic and endoscopy appointments:***

- For the next few weeks, all non-urgent appointments at NSHA facilities are cancelled. Patient's with urgent health issues will continue to be seen.
- At this point all non-urgent endoscopy appointments have been postponed.
- We will be aiming to set up virtual appointments with your GI provider.
- If you are ***unwell from your GI illness / IBD*** please call the **IBD PATIENT HELPLINE at 902-473-4927** to arrange follow-up care.

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> and Crohn's Colitis Canada at <https://crohnsandcolitis.ca/Living-with-Crohn-s-Colitis/COVID-19-and-IBD>