

Briefing Number: 1

Title: Spinal Injuries Association briefing on SCI and Coronavirus

Date: 6 March 2020

Purpose of this document

This information is intended to help SCI people decide what steps they may need to take in light of the spread of the Coronavirus (also known as Covid-19 virus.)

We have received calls asking for advice and information about the global Coronavirus (also known as Covid-19) outbreak. So, we have pulled together resources that we hope you will find useful.

The World Health Organisation has declared the Coronavirus outbreak to be a public health emergency of international concern. In response, the UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the public from low to moderate.

It's important to remember that the risk to people in the UK is low. But reports indicate that coronavirus – or Covid-19 – may cause more severe symptoms and complications in people with suppressed immune systems or respiratory issues – and that includes some SCI people

We'll keep this information up to date.

If you have additional questions about your SCI and Coronavirus or if your SCI related needs are not being met whilst being treated for Coronavirus, please ring our Freephone Advice Line on 0800 980 0501.

What is Coronavirus?

A coronavirus is a type of virus. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world. This strain, Covid-19, is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China in January 2020.

What are the symptoms?

The following symptoms may develop in the 14 days after exposure to someone who has covid-19 infection:

- A cough
- A high temperature
- Shortness of breath

What should I do if I am worried I might have contracted Coronavirus?

At the moment, the number of people diagnosed with Coronavirus is limited. However, if you are worried about symptoms, please call NHS 111 or go to the [NHS 111 Coronavirus website](#)

Do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment such as your local SCI Centre unless specifically told to do so by 111.

The latest government information on Coronavirus can be found at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public

How is coronavirus spread?

The coronavirus is spread by droplet infection - coughing and sneezing or by close contact with someone who has the virus.

Like the normal cold virus, it's spread from one person to another. To reduce the spread of viruses like these, the World Health Organisation strongly advises you **cover your mouth and nose when sneezing using a tissue**. (If you don't have a tissue, sneeze into your elbow instead of your hands.) Put the tissue straight into a closed bin. Wash your hands with soap and hot water and try to avoid people who cough and sneeze by keeping your distance or if you know someone who is currently unwell with the symptoms.

What is the best way to prevent the spread of Coronavirus?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Alternatively, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if no soap and water is available. This is particularly important after taking public transport.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home and work environment.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

How is Coronavirus treated?

Currently, there is no specific vaccine or treatment. The best way to recover from it is to:

- get plenty of rest
- keep hydrated
- take simple remedies such as paracetamol to help with symptoms such as a high temperature

Researchers around the world are working to try to develop a vaccine.

What are the specific needs of SCI people?

There are no indicators that SCI people are more likely to catch Coronavirus, but as many SCI people have suppressed immune systems or respiratory issues, the consequences may be more severe. Therefore, SCI people and their families, friends and healthcare professionals should more rigorously follow the advice above and their own infection control routines.

Care staff, especially those who support many people, should be particularly observant. There is specific advice for social care settings - see below.

Should SCI people take specific precautions?

There are no specific precautions that will protect SCI people from getting infected other than the general precautions that detailed above. It is important that SCI people closely follow this advice as they are at greater risk of developing more serious symptoms should they become infected.

What if my personal assistant or carer gets sick?

Ensure you have sufficient backup in case your regular carer or personal assistant cannot work.

- If a carer or Personal Assistant does not show up for work, ensure you have the ability to get assistance.
- Have at least a week of non-perishable food in your home at any given time and identify people who can assist with shopping or delivery.
- Stock up on other important supplies (e.g., toilet paper, cleaning supplies, hygiene products, etc.).
- Identify a way to make sure you can get your medications in a timely manner such as having friends or family assist you or using a pharmacy that offers a home delivery service, such as SIA Healthcare.
- Have backup carers or Personal Assistant wash their hands and use hand sanitizer when they arrive and each time prior to touching or feeding you.
- Regularly clean, sanitize and disinfect the surfaces that are touched in your home to prevent spread of infection.
- Use disinfecting wipes on items that are frequently touched.
- Urge carer or Personal Assistant to seek medical care if they are sick and utilize your backup support.

How is SIA supporting SCI people?

We are:

1. Providing and regularly updating accurate and timely advice to SCI people, their families, friends and carers who are concerned about Coronavirus. Please visit spinal.co.uk for regular updates.
2. Working with NHS to better understand and plan for the impact of Coronavirus on SCI people and reinforcing their infection control messages
3. Taking active measures to protect SIA staff and volunteers from the risks of Coronavirus and to ensure we can continue to deliver our services and support to SIA people

Is Spinal Injuries Association being affected in other ways?

As a responsible employer we are monitoring the situation on a daily basis to both protect our staff, volunteers and service users and ensure that we can continue to deliver services to SCI people. We are currently working as normal.

Resources

[Instructions on handwashing](#)

Key up-to-date information from the government:

[GOV.UK: COVID-19 latest information and advice](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>

[NHS coronavirus advice](https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19)

<https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>

Sector-specific guidance

[GOV.UK: Guidance for social or community care and residential settings on COVID-19](#)

[GOV.UK: COVID-19 guidance for educational settings](#)

[NHS England: Coronavirus information for health professionals](#)

Travel advice

[GOV.UK: COVID-19 travel advice](#)

[GOV.UK: COVID-19 specified countries and areas with implications for returning travellers or visitors arriving in the UK](#)

Further information

- Visit our website spinal.co.uk for further updates
- Follow us on social media:
 - Facebook: [Spinal Injuries Association](#)
 - Twitter: [@spinalinjuries](#)
- Call our advice line on 0800 980 0501 from 1100 - 1630 for further information and guidance.

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