

Coronavirus (Covid-19) and myeloma

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Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some of which can cause symptoms similar to influenza (flu). A new strain which is circulating is called coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which can affect your lungs and airways.

Whilst many people will only get mild to moderate symptoms, patients with myeloma should be extra cautious during the current outbreak. This is because myeloma and its treatment can weaken the ability of the immune system to fight infection, making patients more susceptible to catching coronavirus and experiencing complications.

This especially applies to patients in periods of active treatment (e.g. currently receiving chemotherapy and/or immunotherapy), but the risk extends beyond that: the after-effects of treatment can continue for much longer than someone's last course of treatment, and the immunosuppressive effects of the treatment can be long-term.

During this unprecedented period, it is important not to panic but to follow the advice of your Government, healthcare professionals (such as your haematologist [myeloma doctor]), healthcare providers (such as your health ministry/hospital) and experts (such as the World Health Organisation and European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention).

Myeloma Patients Europe (MPE) is currently working with myeloma clinicians to put together a detailed FAQ for myeloma and AL amyloidosis patients. If you have any specific questions you wish to ask, please email info@mpeurope.org

In the meantime, MPE has collated the following tips for myeloma patients to follow during this time.

Maintain social distancing

Where possible, limit leaving your home and reduce social contact. Make arrangements to work from home if this is a possibility. Remember, you have many options to contact friends, family, colleagues or clients via phone, email, social media, or online-teleconferencing options. In public spaces, keep a distance of at least one to two metres (3-6 feet) between yourself and others, particularly anyone who is coughing or sneezing. Avoid public meetings or events, avoid travelling by bus, train, metro and plane.

Wash your hands more frequently than normal

Wash your hands more frequently, with soap or an alcohol-based rub, for at least twenty seconds. This should kill the viruses that may be on your hands. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces with a soap or alcohol based cleaner.

Practice good respiratory hygiene

Make sure that you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.

Face masks can catch droplets from nose and mouth which can spread the virus, however, there is limited evidence to demonstrate how effective they are in preventing people from catching or passing the virus on – particularly for cancer patients. If you chose to wear a face mask, do not rely upon it as a preventative measure and use it in combination with other preventative measures outlined in this document. In addition, if you use a mask, it should be used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water. You must also know how to use the mask and dispose of it properly.

Due to the limited evidence, please seek the advice of a healthcare professional before using a face mask. You can find more information on the use of face masks from the World Health Organisation here:
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth

Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and make you sick.

Stay healthy

Maintain your usual health routine to stay fit and well but avoid going to public gyms and swimming pools. Get a good night's sleep - 6, 7 or 8 hours a night is best. Exercise, either at home or in an open space - a walk or run in the fresh air is a good way to stay healthy. Eat well and pay attention to your nutrition: you should try to eat a balanced diet, with lots of fruits and vegetables. If possible, you could make use of your local supermarket's online home delivery service to avoid a trip to the store or request assistance from family and friends.

Stay informed

Stay informed on the latest developments about coronavirus. Follow advice given by your healthcare provider, healthcare professional, your national and local health authorities or your employer on how to protect yourself from coronavirus. If you have specific concerns, contact your primary healthcare professional or your haematology team. Try to contact them via phone or email first, before going to hospital.

Should you develop symptoms

The main symptoms of coronavirus include respiratory symptoms, high fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, symptoms can include pneumonia, acute respiratory syndrome and kidney failure.

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MYELOMA, AL AMYLOIDOSIS AND CORONAVIRUS

- 1 SOCIAL DISTANCING**

Where possible, limit leaving your home. Make arrangements to work from home if this is a possibility. Avoid public meetings or events, avoid travelling by bus, train, metro, plane.
- 2 WASH YOUR HANDS**

Wash your hands more frequently, with soap or an alcohol-based rub, for about twenty seconds. This kills any viruses that may be on your hands. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces with a soap or alcohol based cleaner.
- 3 RESPIRATORY HYGIENE**

Make sure that you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.
- 4 AVOID TOUCHING YOUR EYES, NOSE AND MOUTH**

Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and make you sick.
- 5 STAY HEALTHY**

Maintain your usual health routine in order to stay fit and well. Exercise, either at home or in an open space a walk or run in the fresh air is a good way to stay healthy.
- 6 SHOULD YOU DEVELOP SYMPTOMS**

High fever, a deep dry cough, fatigue and shortness of breath are the main symptoms. If this is your case, call your healthcare provider to seek advice, and plan your potential visit in advance. Make sure that the person you're speaking with is aware that you are a myeloma patient.

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If you are experiencing these symptoms, it is important to stay at home and seek medical advice promptly but do not attend hospital unless you are advised to (e.g. by a doctor, your haematologist, healthcare provider, out of hours contact etc). Make sure that the person you are speaking to is aware that you are a myeloma patient. Follow their instructions and advice.

If you are a myeloma patient who is currently receiving treatment, it is important to make sure you continue taking it as instructed unless a haematologist tells you otherwise.

If you are experiencing severe symptoms and need urgent medical attention call a healthcare provider or emergency helpline immediately. You should also get in touch with your haematologist if possible, to let them know.

Further reading

The World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance and country specific information can be found here: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control guidance and information can be found here: <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china>