

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) patients and COVID-19

We know that a lot of the information about COVID-19 for the general public does not answer the concerns of people with CLL. The UKCLL forum has produced this information leaflet to provide extra advice for CLL patients. Unfortunately, all CLL patients have weakened immune systems as a result of the CLL (including untreated patients). Treatment can add to this immune weakness. People with reduced immunity are at greater risk of catching & being affected by COVID-19 than the general population. The virus affects the respiratory system, so the main risks are lung infection. There are no treatments or vaccines for COVID-19 so we cannot offer treatments to prevent people from getting it. What we can do is reduce the risk of spreading it. Like the common cold, COVID-19 infection usually occurs through close contact with a person with the virus, via cough, sneezes or hand contact. Washing your hands frequently reduces the contamination risk.

If you think you might have been exposed to the virus, you should follow the same instructions as those for the general public & phone NHS 111. Make sure you tell the person you speak to about your CLL & treatment. If on chemotherapy you should also phone your normal chemotherapy helpline so they are aware.

The main action you can take is to reduce your exposure risk. It is safer for people with reduced immunity to avoid hospitals & GP surgeries as far as possible. Doctors are therefore looking at clinic lists to see if people could have a telephone consultation instead. You will be notified if there are any changes to your hospital appointments. We would recommend the following measures to try to reduce your risk of exposure to COVID-19 as much as possible until the pandemic is over;

Self-isolation- You should avoid using public transport & avoid crowded places & large events. You should avoid seeing any family or friends who are unwell even with mild cold symptoms. Individuals with few or no symptoms could unknowingly pass on the virus. While complete isolation is very challenging & stressful, reducing contact with others will reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. We suggest that a friend or member of your family collect any prescriptions for you to avoid coming to hospital if possible.

Work -You should try to work from home if possible.

Foreign Travel- As the situation & number of cases world-wide are evolving rapidly and you are particularly at risk, we would recommend that you should avoid all foreign travel until the COVID-19 pandemic is over. You should also avoid seeing any family or friends with a recent travel history abroad for at least 2 weeks after their return.

Treatment; chemotherapy & immunotherapy- After discussion with you, your consultant may recommend deferring or delaying treatment if they feel it is in your best interest. Please do not stop any treatment for CLL without discussing this with your consultant or a member of their team first.

We want to reassure you that doctors & nurses are doing all they can to ensure that they can continue your care & treatment safely. If you have specific questions about your treatment or hospital appointments please get in touch with your local team.

For the latest NHS information:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/common-questions/>