

# Manchester Uveitis Clinic

April 2020

## Information for clinic patients during the COVID-19 epidemic

### General information about Manchester Royal Eye Hospital at this time

We understand that many people with uveitis/inflammatory eye conditions and their families will be very concerned about the coronavirus pandemic. This letter is to explain how we will manage your care over the coming months.

During these difficult times, the work of the Manchester Uveitis Clinic (MUC) has had to change drastically. The Manchester Foundation Trust (which includes the Manchester Royal Eye Hospital), like all acute hospital trusts in the UK, has been instructed to prepare for a worsening epidemic, and has taken the following measures:

1. All routine outpatient clinics have been cancelled, and have been replaced with an urgent-only system, to be prioritised by the clinic consultants
2. All non-urgent surgery has been cancelled.
3. Some doctors who work in MUC have been or will be asked to work in other clinical areas.
4. Some doctors who work in MUC, because of their personal increased risk from infection, have been instructed to leave the hospital and undertake no face-to-face work. Other members of staff may be self-isolating if they or a household contact has symptoms of COVID-19. Overall, there are far fewer doctors available now to see patients in MUC.
5. Increased protection will be in place for doctors and other staff continuing to perform face-to-face consultations, and this may be time-consuming.
6. Telephone consultations are being used and will be used more frequently over the next few months, for patients who have stable eye conditions.
7. Face-to-face consultations are only being provided for emergencies and for patients where their consultant feels this is absolutely necessary. Almost all will be moved to a different location at Altrincham Hospital.

8. Blood testing for patients requiring regular monitoring will continue and is being offered at Altrincham Hospital for most patients and in some circumstances at MREH.
9. Procedures for ensuring that essential repeat prescriptions are delivered to patients, are being arranged (see below for details)
10. Your care will continue to be led by your existing Manchester Uveitis Clinic consultants.

## **Outpatient MUC clinics**

From now on and until further notice, consultants are looking through the lists of patients who are due to have an appointment or surgery in MUC over the following weeks, and are deciding whether a face-to-face consultation is absolutely necessary. Your appointment may be changed to a telephone consult or deferred for several months.

**A face-to-face consultation will only be booked if there are acute or severe ongoing or worsening vision problems.** If this is the case (decided initially by the consultant on the basis of existing information) you will be informed of the time and place of your appointment.

### **If you are given an appointment for face-to-face consultation:**

DO NOT attend the appointment if you develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 or if you may have been in contact with it; instead ring one of the contact numbers given below

DO NOT bring anyone to accompany you into the building unless you need physical assistance

DO NOT arrive until shortly before your appointment time. Please do not be late.

BRING WITH YOU a list of all your medications, and be prepared to make clear which medications prescribed by MUC need repeat-prescribing

Be prepared to be seen at a greater separation than normal from other staff, who may be wearing personal protection equipment (PPE).

Please understand that eye photography and other tests are now being limited to the bare minimum, and that decisions on this will be made by the doctor in clinic. In some circumstances, your examination may be replaced by photography.

Be prepared for a 2-phase consultation; the first, talking part being conducted at a distance, and the slit-lamp examination being brief, with special protective equipment in place. After-examination talking may then take place elsewhere (different room/telephone/video).

**DO NOT come to Manchester Royal Eye Hospital/Altrincham Hospital unless you have a confirmed appointment. If you have any enquiry or concern about eye condition or prescription, please use one of the contact numbers below**

### **Off-site face-to-face consultations for immunosuppressed patients**

Any patient at clearly increased risk from COVID-19 who nevertheless requires a face-to-face consultation will be seen by the uveitis team, in Consultant led clinics, at a location outside Central Hospitals (in the MREH outreach clinic at Altrincham Hospital: 15 Railway Street, Altrincham, WA14 2RQ). See below for risks associated with immunosuppression.

An **emergency only** clinic will operate on an as needed basis in MREH.

## Telephone consultations

Patients who are likely to be stable will be telephoned to check status, to provide ongoing advice, to reassess risk, and to arrange repeat prescriptions and blood monitoring tests. A record will be kept of each telephone consultation as would be done normally.

The telephone consult will be an opportunity to discuss your individual risk of infection, including if you fall into moderate or high-risk category groups. We will offer advice on your individual risk, based on assessment of your condition, treatment, medical history, and work and social circumstances. This will be used to discuss what guidance you should follow for social distancing.

During the telephone consult you will be advised on a plan for a further follow up by the uveitis service and this may include a further telephone consultation or plan for a future clinic appointment. In some circumstances we will request for a blood taking visit only.

## Immunosuppression – What to Do

### *Should I continue my long-term treatment?*

**If you take immunosuppression tablets**, including azathioprine (Imuran® or others), ciclosporin (Deximmune®), methotrexate tablets or injections, mycophenolate mofetil (various tradenames) or tacrolimus (Adoport®), **or corticosteroid (Prednisolone) tablets, or biologic injections /infusions** (Adalimumab, Infliximab, Tocilizumab) **the national recommendation is for you continue to take these medications.**

### *What if I have symptoms of COVID-19 or any other infection?*

If you develop an infection, or symptoms of coronavirus, you are advised to **temporarily stop your immunosuppression** medication, as per the normal guidance for infections. However, **do not stop taking long-term steroid (Prednisolone) abruptly.**

If you are diagnosed with coronavirus, when you are able, please let the uveitis service know. We will gather this information to contribute to knowledge about COVID-19 in uveitis patients, so that we can advise patients as accurately as possible

### *Do I still need monitoring blood tests?*

**Yes, we will contact you to organise these.** For all stable patients these will now be every 3 months and in some circumstances, longer. If you normally have blood tests with your GP please continue if possible; if normally in MREH, we will contact you to organise. This will be offered in our outreach clinic in Altrincham.

## Prescriptions

If you normally get your medications from your GP (including immunosuppressant tablets if they will prescribe them) please **continue to request your medications from your GP**.

Patients who are using immunosuppressant tablets, or biologic injections, or lopidine (apraclonidine) 1% eye drops can usually **only** obtain these from pharmacy at MREH and this will continue to be the situation. If prescribed following a telephone consultation, please ask a friend or family member to collect the medication for you; a delivery of medication could be made to you (in very limited circumstances only).

**Please note:** patients who normally receive medications from a rheumatology service or other medical specialty will also be contacted separately by their prescribing team.

If you attend a face-to-face consultation, ensure that you obtain a repeat prescription of any of these medicines **before you leave the clinic**. If you undertake a telephone consultation, please ensure that the doctor knows if you need a repeat prescription.

### Eye drops and other medications

For all other medicines first prescribed by MUC, including all eye drops except for lopidine 1%, **please request repeat prescriptions from your GP**.

Consultants at MUC will be asking all GPs to continue prescriptions at this time. If your GP has an online prescription request system, **please use it** to reduce visits to the GP. Please take special care not to run out of medicines; **make requests for a repeat prescription at least 14 days before drops and tablets run out**.

## Patients who are using prednisolone, immunosuppressant or biologic medicine: calculating your risk

The Government has published a list of groups of patients who are at higher risk of getting infections. However, the risks are very variable depending on the number and dose of immunosuppressant medicines that you are taking and any other health conditions that you may have. Over the coming weeks we plan to identify all patients who are at high risk from the virus and to recommend that these patients "**shield**" (see below) to reduce their risk of exposure to COVID-19.

A nationally-agreed scoring table has been produced by the British Society of Rheumatology to calculate risk based on medical conditions and medications. The advice may change and we recommend you follow up-to-date information on the websites listed below, including the UK Uveitis National Clinical Study Group. You may wish to score yourself based on the treatments/medical conditions which apply to you and confirm if this is correct when you receive correspondence from us or during telephone consultation.

How to use the table to calculate your risk yourself:

For each row of the table you will get a score. If the row does not apply to you then you score 0 for that row. Then calculate your total score, and you will then see the relevant instructions.

| Risk factor – <b>Look at each row</b>  | Score   | Your score |
|--|---|------------|
| Are you taking <b>Prednisolone</b> 20mg or more every day, and have you been taking at least 20mg for 4 weeks or more?                 | Answer “No” – Score 0<br>Answer “Yes” – Score 3   |            |
| Are you taking <b>Prednisolone</b> 5mg or more, but less than 20mg, every day for 4 weeks or more?                                     | Answer “No” - Score 0<br>Answer “Yes” - Score 2   |            |
| Have you been given <b>cyclophosphamide</b> within the last six months, or <b>rituximab</b> within the last 12 months?                 | Answer “No” - Score 0<br>Answer “Yes” - Score 3   |            |
| How many <b>immunosuppressant</b> medications or <b>biologic</b> injections are you using from the list below?                         | Answer “1” – Score 1<br>Answer “2 or 3” – Score 2 |            |
| Are you over 70, or do you have any of these conditions: Diabetes, lung disease, kidney disease, heart disease or high blood pressure? | Answer “Yes” to any of these - Score 1            |            |
| <b>Now add “Your scores” up</b>  | <b>YOUR TOTAL SCORE</b>                           |            |

Modified from British Society of Rheumatology Scoring Grid 22/03/20

[https://www.rheumatology.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/COVID19\\_risk\\_scoring\\_guide.pdf?ver=2020-03-23-165634-597](https://www.rheumatology.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/COVID19_risk_scoring_guide.pdf?ver=2020-03-23-165634-597)

**Note that for the drugs “Immunosuppressive medications\*” and “Biologic\*\*” listed in the table, there are lists of what these drugs are below the table**

\* **Immunosuppressive medications:** Azathioprine, Methotrexate, Mycophenolate mofetil, Ciclosporin, Tacrolimus. It does NOT include Hydroxychloroquine or Sulphasalazine, either alone or in combination.

\*\* **Biologic:** adalimumab (i.e. Humira, Amgevita, Imraldi) infliximab, golimumab, certolizumab (and biosimilar variants of all of these); Tocilizumab; Abatacept; Belimumab; Anakinra; Seukinumab; Ixekizumab; Ustekinumab; Sarilumumab; Canakinuma; Rituximab within last 12 months

## Now what do I do?

### 1. If your total score is 3 or more, then you are high risk:

#### **You must follow “shielding” advice:**

Stay at home at all times and avoid all face-to-face contact for at least twelve weeks from today, except from carers and healthcare workers who you must see as part of your medical care. There is more detailed advice on the Gov.UK website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#what-is-shielding>

### 2. If your total score is 2, then you are medium risk:

**You are recommended at your discretion, to either shield or to follow self-isolation advice. Gov.UK guideline link below:**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-advice/>

### 3. If your total score is 1 or 0, then you are low risk:

**You are to maintain strict social distancing.** You may choose to self-isolate to minimise your risk at your discretion. Gov.UK guideline link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

## General Advice, and How to Contact Us

We will resume a normal service as soon as we are able to, in the meantime, we would like to reassure you that we will be available to support you and your concerns via telephone contact. Given the scale of the pandemic we are dealing with a large number of queries daily. **Please only call if you have an urgent query.** A message will be taken but you are not likely to receive an immediate call-back. We will aim to reply when we are able to. Please leave all appropriate contact numbers.

We will write again if the advice changes, or if there are patient groups (for example, people on certain medications) who need additional specific guidance.

**Gigi Binny, Uveitis Nurse Specialist**, is available on 0161 276 6841 and we anticipate your call will be returned within 48hrs (weekdays).

The contact numbers for the **uveitis secretaries** are:

0161 276 5628, 0161 276 5565 and 0161 701 4838

**We recommend the following websites for further information:**

1. UK Uveitis National Clinical Study Group Patient Information page

<https://www.uveitisstudygroup.org/?id=2>

2. Manchester Uveitis Clinic COVID-19 Patient information:

<https://mft.nhs.uk/royal-eye/manchester-uveitis-clinic-advice-for-patients-using-medication-by-mouth-or-by-injection-to-treat-uveitis/>

3. You might be worried about coronavirus (COVID-19) and how it could affect your life. This may include being asked to stay at home or avoid other people. This might feel difficult or stressful. But there are lots of things you can try that could help your wellbeing. Have a look at:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/#collapsec1fd1>

**Please look after yourselves and stay safe!**

**The uveitis consultants, Prof NP Jones, Miss L Steeples, Dr A Stylianides, Dr M Ugarte, Miss R Chhabra and uveitis nurse practitioner Gigi Binny.**