



Patient Information and Consent for Fertility Treatment during the COVID-19 Emergency

As the rate of new cases of COVID-19 reduces, fertility clinics are being allowed to re-open. However, in order to gain permission from our Regulator (The Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority, or the HFEA), clinics have to put in place strict rules to ensure the safety of our patients and staff. In this document we explain what the implications of these changes might be and what you should expect, and prepare for, if you have fertility treatment during the ongoing COVID-19 emergency. Please read this document carefully, even if you have previously had fertility treatment. This is because there are new issues to think about and new risks to consider because of COVID-19.

We hope that with this information will help you to make an informed decision whether to proceed with, or delay, your fertility treatment. If you wish to proceed with your treatment, we will ask you (and your partner, if applicable) to sign a consent form. Alternatively, you can opt to delay your treatment; however it is unclear how long the pandemic will last. Our priority is to provide safe care for our patients whilst minimising the chances of the spread of COVID-19 to patients and our staff.

COVID-19

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered virus, called SARS-COV-2. Most affected people will experience only mild or moderate cold/flu like symptoms. Cough, fever, shortness of breath, headache, sore throat and loss of sense of smell or taste are other relevant symptoms. In a small proportion of patients, the disease can become very severe and require hospitalisation and intensive care. People who are more likely to suffer from severe COVID-19 include those with obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and underlying lung disease. The UK government keeps a record of the number of people diagnosed with, and dying from, COVID-19. More information is available at <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>.

There are two routes by which COVID-19 can be spread. The first is directly through close contact with an infected person. The second route is indirectly via the touching of a surface, object or the hand of an infected person contaminated with infected secretions and subsequently touching one's own mouth, nose or eyes. Please follow the current guidance by the Government relating to minimising spread of infection:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance#guidance-for-the-public>

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- Wash your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and hot water, particularly after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose, or after being in public areas where other people are doing so. Use hand sanitiser if that's all you have access to.
- To reduce the spread of germs when you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or your sleeve (not your hands) if you don't have a tissue, and throw the tissue in a bin immediately. Then wash your hands or use a hand sanitising gel
- Clean and disinfect regularly touched objects and surfaces using your regular cleaning products to reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people

Advice on steps that you can take outside your home are described in this government document: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home>.

We recommend that all patients should self-isolate during fertility treatment and use a face covering when visiting our clinic.

COVID-19 Infection and Pregnancy

At this stage, we only have limited information about the effect of COVID-19 on pregnant women. Pregnant women do not appear more likely to contract the infection than the general population. Early studies have shown that women who suffer from COVID-19 tend to experience similar disease severity to non-pregnant adults. Most women will experience only mild or moderate cold/flu like symptoms.

However, whilst pregnant women are not necessarily more susceptible to viral illness, changes to their immune system in pregnancy can be associated with more severe symptoms in general. This is particularly true towards the end of pregnancy. The overall risk of having severe symptoms is small.

The government advises that all pregnant women should follow self-isolation and social distancing at this time.

Effect of COVID-19 on the Fetus

At this stage, research does not indicate increased risk of miscarriage or birth defects in pregnancies affected by COVID-19. However, much more research is needed before we can be sure of this. The risk of transmission from woman to her baby during pregnancy or childbirth is low, but it has been found to occur.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists provides up-to-date information about COVID-19 and pregnancy. We advise you to read this at:

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/>

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FERTILITY TREATMENT DURING THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY

Prioritisation of Cases

We have a waiting list of patients whose cycles had to be cancelled or who could not start planned treatment as a result of the recent suspension of services. We will re-commence their treatment as soon as feasible. However, due to the additional steps we need to take to reduce the spread of coronavirus, we are likely to be able to treat fewer patients than previously. As a result, we may need to prioritise patients where a delay in starting treatment would seriously harm their chance of success.

If you have underlying medical problems that place you at a higher risk of complications in the event of contracting coronavirus, or you are taking medications that suppress the immune system, we may recommend delaying the start of your fertility treatment.

Measures We Are Taking to Minimise Risk

- Telephone and video consultations will be arranged in place of face-to-face consultations
- The content of our group patient information session for IVF will now be available online to access remotely from home to avoid patients having to gather in large numbers
- There will be controlled entry to the clinic with no drop-in visitors
- The number of visits for monitoring during treatment will be kept to the minimum required to deliver good care
- We are optimising the layout of different areas within the building to help to maintain social distancing
- We are providing appropriate personal protection equipment (PPE) for our staff in line with the Government guidelines on use of PPE
- Our staff have been trained in measures to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. This includes the proper use of PPE and the need to self-isolate if they are at risk of COVID-19.

A Code of Conduct for our Patients

- We advise that patients self-isolate during their treatment until the result of treatment is known.
- Partners are asked to attend only on visits where their presence is essential. Partners are asked not to attend the ward or theatre for egg collection, embryo transfer or Intra-Uterine Insemination

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- We ask you not to bring your children or other relatives with you to appointments.
- We encourage all our patients and visitors to use a face covering when in clinic.
- We ask our patients to attend at their given appointment time and we will endeavour to avoid delays.
- Please do not attend the clinic if you do not have a pre-arranged appointment. Please contact us by telephone to discuss any questions or concerns you may have.
- Please avoid unnecessary exposure to risks of COVID-19 infection by following government guidance and clinic advice.
- Please be aware that travelling on public transport is not advised and can additional risks at this time.
- Please inform us as soon as possible if you or someone you live with experience symptoms or are diagnosed with COVID-19 at any stage during your treatment, or if you have been placed at risk of contracting COVID-19.

Screening and Testing for COVID-19 Before Starting Treatment

We will ask you to complete a short screening questionnaire and we will arrange for you to have a swab test. The timing of your swab test will be communicated to you on an individual basis. If your screening or swab shows positive results, you will only be able to start your treatment after you have recovered and are no longer carrying the virus. If you have had COVID-19 previously, we will only be able to start treatment once you are no longer carrying the virus. If you required hospital admission for COVID-19 we will need to obtain specialist medical advice before offering treatment.

Screening During Treatment (IVF, Frozen Embryo Transfer, IUI)

We will ask you to answer a screening questionnaire prior to every visit to the clinic, as well as on the day of trigger (if an egg collection or IUI is planned) or on the day of starting progesterone (if a frozen embryo transfer is planned).

A further swab test will be done on the day of trigger (if an egg collection or IUI is planned) or on the day of starting progesterone (if a frozen embryo transfer is planned).

You will be able to proceed with your treatment if the screening questionnaires are negative and the COVID-19 swab test results are negative.

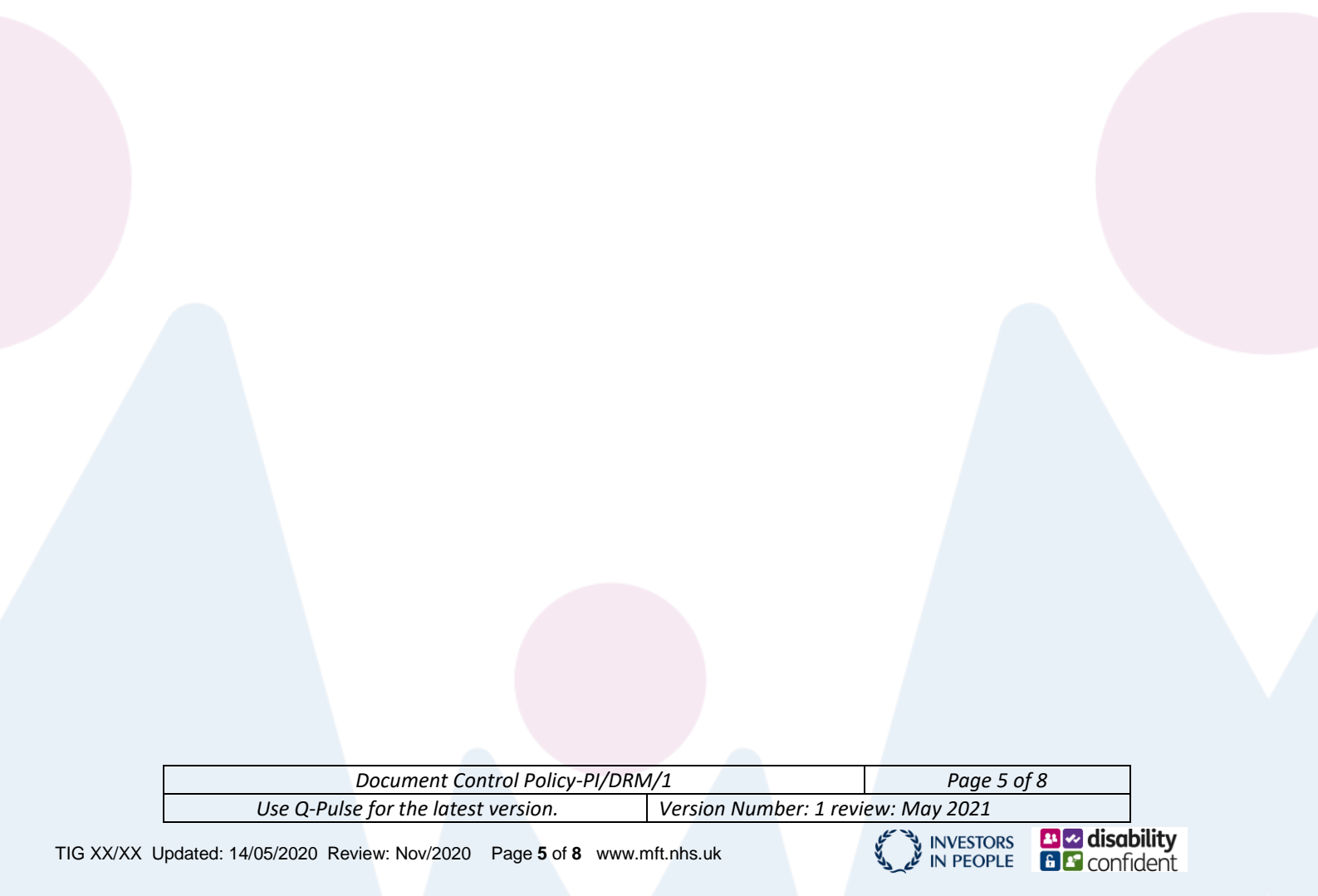
If You Develop Symptoms during Your Fertility Treatment

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Please inform us as soon as possible if you or someone you live with experience symptoms or are diagnosed with COVID-19 at any stage during your treatment on 0161-276-6000

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (Covid-19) are recent onset of a persistent cough, fever, shortness of breath, headache, sore throat and loss of sense of smell or taste. If you have any of these symptoms, however mild, please tell us. Stay at home and do not leave your house for 7 days from when your symptoms started or 14 days if you live with someone who has symptoms. If your symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after 7 days, contact NHS 111 online. If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. For a medical emergency dial 999.



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What will happen to your treatment if you are at risk of COVID-19 during treatment

If you develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 or screen positive on the questionnaire during treatment, it is likely that your treatment will need to be stopped. In some circumstances, we may be able to arrange a repeat swab test, with the possibility that your treatment could continue if we can be sure that you are not infected as defined by national guidelines. However, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do this.

If you develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 or screen positive on the questionnaire after the ovulatory trigger, we will carry out a careful risk assessment to weigh the risks of cancelling the egg collection procedure against proceeding. This means that you may not be able to have your eggs collected despite having completed the stimulation and monitoring required.

If you develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 or screen positive on the questionnaire after egg collection but prior to embryo transfer, we will advise you to freeze all your embryos for future use. A fresh embryo transfer will not be performed.

Funding implications of Treatment Cycles Delayed or Cancelled Due to COVID-19

NHS Patients: If your treatment cycle is cancelled for clinical reasons, we will subsequently request the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to replace the funding for the cancelled treatment cycle. However we cannot guarantee the outcome of the CCG request. We have asked our partner CCGs to ensure that NHS fertility patients are not disadvantaged by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fee-Paying Patients: Please see our refund policy.

Other implications of having fertility treatment during the COVID-19 Emergency

While COVID-19 is prevalent in the community and among healthcare providers it is likely that some members of our staff may need to self-isolate if they, or a member of their household, develop symptoms. If this happens to a significant number of staff at the same time, there is a possibility that we may have to limit the treatment we offer. A similar problem may arise if there is a shortage of laboratory consumables or medicines required for fertility treatment. In such a situation we will do our best to complete any treatment cycles we have already started. We will make sure we communicate with patients either through our website or on an individual basis.

There are significant restrictions on routine NHS work at this time which may affect your care. For instance, elective surgery has not yet restarted and there are likely to be significant waiting lists when it does restart. Similarly, many Early Pregnancy and Emergency Units are offering a reduced service with no 'walk-in' facilities. This may affect your care in early pregnancy if there were to be any complications but there will be advice and guidance available to all patients.

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Counselling and Support

We understand that the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty arising from it will result in an increased level of anxiety and stress in our patients. Our staff have been trained to be aware of this and to be supportive. We have arranged for our counselling services to be available via telephone and video calls. We encourage you to continue to access support according to your need, by asking for an appointment with our counsellors.

If you have further questions about any of the matters discussed in this document, please contact us by telephone on **0161-276-6000** or visit our website.

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