

Coronavirus advice for people with a laryngectomy

The corona virus is transmitted into the bloodstream via the mucus membrane, and you can also imbibe it via the digestive tract. It cannot penetrate intact skin, as skin is waterproof. For laryngectomees and people with tracheostomy there is an additional route to infection - via the open stoma.

A very important aspect is to prevent the virus staying on our hands and accessing those routes – always wash hands before eating and avoid touching eyes, lips, nose and the face, carefully dispose of used tissues or items which may be contaminated and use clean technique when managing your stoma.

When managing your own stoma you don't need to use gloves, but you should wash your hands afterwards to prevent contamination of items and surfaces which may put others at risk.

Clean technique is good practice at any time and involves limiting the number of germs in a patient's vicinity.

Clean technique does not require the use of sterile instruments and equipment. The aim of this technique is to avoid directly contaminating instruments and materials that will come into contact with the patient or others in the vicinity. Some examples of clean technique practices include thorough handwashing, wearing gloves, and maintaining a clean environment or work area. Clean technique uses "non-touch" practices. Non-touch practices prohibit touching key parts of objects, such as syringe tips and the inside of sterile dressings, even when wearing gloves.

Reduce the risk of infection to protect yourself and those you live and work with:

- maintain good hand hygiene by washing regularly with soap and hot water, for at least 20 seconds
- avoid touching the face, mouth, nose and eyes, and the stoma
- regularly clean mobile phones and door handles and other surfaces which may be contaminated
- wash your hands thoroughly before attending to your stoma/voice prosthesis/tube
- use clean technique when cleaning and storing tubes, voice prosthesis and brushes – keep soiled and clean items separate to avoid cross contamination and always clean the surfaces you have placed soiled items on
- use clean technique when cleaning the stoma and the neck around the stoma, and when changing the voice prosthesis, baseplate, HME and laryngectomy/tracheostomy tube
- don't use your saliva as a lubricant for inserting the laryngectomy tube
- maintain “non-touch” technique - use a proprietary lubricant, put a small amount onto a clean tissue, and use a clean finger to apply to your clean tube, rather than touch the tube to the nozzle
- clean re-useable items such as dilators and brushes and store in clean containers
- catch your cough in a tissue
- dispose of soiled items such as tissues where they do not pose a risk to others
- keep hydrated, wear your usual HME/stoma cover, and be vigilant for tracheal crusting

Some clinicians advise using additional layers of protection, using bibs and neck snoods, for people who need additional filtration, such as builders and cyclists. This is not evidence-based, but it does provide an additional barrier for warmth and for larger particles.

The evidence for Micron HME cassettes does not currently conclusively demonstrate additional protection to the virus. Continue to use your usual HME cassettes day to day and consider using Micron if you are going to a crowded place, attending hospital appointments, flying, or in contact with anyone who is unwell.

Here is the guidance that the NHS has published for people at increased risk

You should only leave the house for very limited purposes:

- shopping for basic necessities, for example food and medicine, which must be as infrequent as possible

- one form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk, or cycle – alone or with members of your household

- any medical need, including to donate blood, avoid or escape risk of injury or harm, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person

- travelling for work purposes, but only where you cannot work from home

The NHS also has a list of people at even higher risk. People who had had a laryngectomy are not on this list but you might feel that it makes sense for you to follow these stricter guidelines.

Do

- stay at home at all times – do not leave your home to buy food, collect medicine or exercise

- stay at least 2 metres (3 steps) away from other people in your home as much as possible

- get food and medicine delivered and left outside your door – ask friends and family to help or register to get coronavirus support on GOV.UK if you need it

- prepare a hospital bag, including a list of the medicines you're taking – in case you need to go into hospital

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds

- make sure anyone who comes into your home washes their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds

- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available

- clean objects and surfaces you touch often (like door handles, kettles and phones) using your regular cleaning products

- clean a shared bathroom each time you use it, for example by wiping the surfaces you have touched

Dont

do not have visitors in your home, including friends and family, unless they're providing essential care

do not stop taking any prescription medicines without speaking to your doctor