

COVID-19 update for people living with HIV in Tayside: COVID testing, COVID treatment and COVID vaccines

It has been a little while since we have updated you and things continue to change regularly. I hope that by the time I write this and you read it, nothing more will have changed.

COVID testing

You may have heard that home testing using lateral flow devices (LFDs) and PCR tests is going to be phased out towards the end of April 2022. The approach to “living with COVID” is to treat it like many other community viruses that circulate that we don’t usually do tests for like flu, colds and tummy bugs. This means that you may have symptoms of COVID but won’t know if it is or isn’t COVID. We are advised to act like we would with any other infection and take sensible steps to take care of ourselves and to avoid passing it on.

The only people who can get a COVID LFD test are people who are eligible for outpatient COVID treatment with anti-virals. If someone is eligible for COVID treatment in the event they had the infection, then they should keep a supply of LFDs at home. These can be ordered from this website: <https://www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests> or you can phone 119 to request a supply. Check the information below to see if you are eligible and if you are, don’t wait until you have symptoms to order tests – have them at home and ready!

If you are eligible for COVID treatments and you develop symptoms of COVID then you should do a LFD test. If the result is positive then get treatment. If the result is negative and you have symptoms the next day then test again. If it is still negative and you have symptoms on day 3 then test again! If any of these tests are positive then seek treatment. If you have a positive test then please register it on the national system.

If you are not eligible for COVID treatments then, like the rest of the population, you don’t need to test even if you have symptoms. So you don’t need to order in tests. If you have any worrying symptoms then you should contact your GP during working hours or NHS24 in the evening or weekends on 111. If you think it is life-threatening then dial 999.

COVID treatments

There are now a number of different treatments that can be given to some people with COVID to reduce the chance that they will need hospital care. These treatments are being offered to people who are considered to be at highest risk of more serious COVID disease. Some people living with HIV might be considered at higher risk and these are:

- Anyone with a detectable viral load
- Anyone with a CD4 count less than 350
- Anyone who
 - ✓ is over 55 years old
 - ✓ is on treatment for diabetes
 - ✓ has liver cirrhosis (scarring)
 - ✓ has heart failure

- ✓ has moderate-to-severe asthma
- ✓ has kidney disease
- ✓ is dependent on alcohol
- ✓ is homeless

If you think you may be eligible for COVID therapies then order some LFD tests to have in the house in case you develop symptoms (see above).

If you think you may be eligible for COVID therapies, have symptoms of COVID **and** have a positive COVID LFD test then do the following:

1. Log your positive LFD result by **one** of the following means:
 - At this website: <https://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result>
 - By phoning 119

2. Phone the COVID treatment referral line for the region where you live:
 - Tayside - 01382 919477
 - If you live in another health board area then you can find their COVID treatment line number here: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-treatments>

Your call will be taken by a nurse or member of the administration team who will take some initial details. You will then get a call back (usually within 24 hours but may be longer at weekends) and be assessed by a clinician over the phone.

If eligible for treatment, you'll be asked about the medicines that you're currently taking. This is for safety reasons as some medicines can cause serious side effects when taken together. Please have the list of medicines that you're taking handy when you call. This includes medicines prescribed by your GP practice or hospital, medicines prescribed privately outside of the NHS, and any medicines bought from a pharmacy or shop without a prescription. Remember to also include herbal remedies and vitamin supplements you are taking, as well as medicines that come in patches, inhalers, suppositories, lozenges, gels, ointments, or creams. All of the COVID treatments that may be offered can be safely taken with your HIV treatment.

If it is decided that you would benefit from one of the COVID treatments then either arrange a course of tablets will be arranged for you or you will be invited to Ninewells Hospital for an infusion.

COVID vaccines

You may be aware that there is a “Spring booster” being rolled out to people at higher risk of more serious COVID. All the way through the pandemic we have been advised to divide our patients into risk groups. One of the biggest frustrations for us was that these groups were different for shielding, for vaccine priority and for COVID therapies. In a bid to make things easier it was agreed nationally that all people living with HIV can be invited for the “Spring booster”. This doesn't mean that we are worried that all of our patients are at significant risk. If you meet any of the above criteria for COVID treatments then I'd strongly recommend that you take the booster when you are invited. If you don't

meet the criteria then I would still recommend that you take the booster as it is a great opportunity to be at the front of the queue.

If you haven't had any or all of the recommended doses yet then it isn't too late! There have been billions of doses given out across the world and although the current vaccines don't completely eliminate the risk of infection or onward transmission, they do reduce the risk of severe infection. And there is so much evidence now that they are extremely safe. If you want to arrange to start the course of vaccines or have any doses you might have missed then you can arrange it online <https://vacs.nhs.scot/csp> or you can call the vaccine helpline on 0800 030 8013.

Dr Sarah Allstaff

Consultant Physician

On behalf of the HIV Clinical Team

27.04.2022