

Information on Surgery during the COVID-19 pandemic

You were offered surgery to treat your condition at SWLEOC. This leaflet explains how circumstances have changed since the onset of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and how this may affect you.

COVID-19 is a new disease caused by a virus known as SARS-CoV-2 (Coronavirus). Approximately one in five people who catch the virus do not experience any symptoms and will be unaware that they have been infected. Most patients who catch Coronavirus only experience mild flu-like symptoms. Unfortunately, about one in five people develop a more serious illness (COVID-19 disease) and may need to be admitted to hospital. In our area just over one in ten of the people requiring hospital treatment have needed to be looked after in the intensive care unit and, sadly about a quarter of our hospital admissions have died.

Under normal circumstances, the great majority of patients enjoy a smooth recovery from orthopaedic surgery and only a small percentage experience any kind of complication. Before your admission for surgery, your consultant will have discussed the benefits of the operation that you have been offered and the risk of complications that this entails. During the Coronavirus pandemic, it is vital that we minimise the chance of you coming into hospital while you are developing a Coronavirus infection and that we minimise the risk of you catching Coronavirus while you are in hospital. This is because we know that people having surgery while they have Coronavirus are much more likely to suffer serious COVID-19 disease.

A. We will employ several measures to minimise the risk of COVID-19 adversely affecting you, such as:

- 1) We will assess your health in relation to the risk factors for surgery, anaesthesia and COVID-19 disease. If your surgery is deemed high risk, your operation may have to be deferred for the time being. You will receive a separate letter if your surgery is deemed high risk.
- 2) Our plan is to resume surgery on patients with the fewest underlying medical conditions so that surgery is deemed low risk and patients who really need urgent surgery. We hope that this will minimise the risk of severe symptoms if anyone does contract Coronavirus infection.
- 3) To minimise the risk of anyone with active Coronavirus infection being admitted to SWLEOC, all patients need to self-isolate for 14 days before their admission. You must be confident that neither you, nor anyone living with you, has had any COVID-19 symptoms in the two weeks preceding your admission. Also, a swab test that we will take from you, in the 48-72 hours before your admission, must be negative.
- 4) We have initiated a screening programme to check that all the staff looking after you are free of coronavirus. In addition staff will wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when they are treating you.
- 5) To keep you and our staff safe, you will not be allowed any visitors whilst you are in hospital.

- 6) We will not keep you in hospital any longer than necessary.
- 7) You will need to self-isolate yourself for 14 days after your discharge from hospital to protect you from catching the virus. This can be with your family or carers. This also means that you will not be able to see a physiotherapist while you are self-isolating. To minimise the effect of this restriction, we will provide you with instructions for the exercises that you should undertake and provide you with telephone and/or online support from our physiotherapy team.
- 8) We are working with our partner hospitals to establish safe pathways in all departments to look after patients. In the unlikely event that you needed to be transferred out of SWLEOC we will do our utmost to ensure that you are transferred to a safe area.

B. If you decide to go ahead with surgery, there are COVID-19 related risks that you need to consider. These include:

- 1) With the measures outlined above, the risk of you carrying Coronavirus at the time of surgery will be very low, but can not be excluded.
- 2) You could be unknowingly carrying Coronavirus, despite not having any symptoms when you come into hospital for your operation.
- 3) You could catch Coronavirus from one of the hospital staff or other patients, who are unknowingly carrying the virus.
- 4) If you are carrying Coronavirus when your surgery is undertaken or if you develop COVID-19 symptoms, soon after surgery, your recovery could be prolonged and there is a significant risk of developing serious illness, possibly leading to admission to intensive care or even death. This risk is greater if you are over 65 years of age or if you have underlying conditions such as diabetes, serious obesity, chronic lung disease, serious heart disease, chronic kidney disease, liver disease (such as cirrhosis) or if you are immunocompromised.
- 5) Your recovery from surgery could be compromised if you catch Coronavirus in the first few months after your operation and may require readmission to hospital.
- 6) We will do our best to ensure that you have your operation on the day it is planned. Please note that these are exceptional times. It is possible that any planned surgery may be postponed for reasons outside our control such as lack of anaesthetic drugs or critical equipment.

At present we cannot provide you with any hard numbers to quantify the additional risk that COVID-19 could have on the outcome of your operation. Your consultant (or a member of their team) will contact you to discuss these risks with you and will be able to answer any questions that you may have. We hope that you will be reassured to know that we will be monitoring the progress of all our patients through our outcomes programme so that we are alerted to any COVID-19 related, or any other complications, as quickly as possible.

If you have any questions that you would like to ask before deciding whether to go ahead with your operation please call the pre-assessment team on [redacted]. If you decide not to go ahead with surgery at present, we will keep your name on our books. If you change your mind in the future then you may contact our admissions team on [redacted]. Alternatively, if you would like to go ahead with your operation, we look forward to seeing you in the near future.