

Surgical Care during the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic

Key Information for patients

The University Hospitals of North Midlands will do everything possible to provide essential surgery at this time. However, the coronavirus pandemic is placing huge demands on the entire health service and is changing the way we work. This leaflet is to make you aware that your surgical care may be affected in many ways.

We must be clear that;

Your assessment and care may be disrupted, delayed or performed differently during the pandemic.

Depending on the level of COVID-19 coronavirus circulating in the local population, you might be carrying the virus without showing any symptoms when you come for your operation. Coming to hospital might also increase your chances of contracting COVID-19 virus despite all the precautions we will take. However, considering the decreasing level of COVID-19 virus in the general population (May 2020), the risk of either of these, at the time of writing this leaflet, is low.

If COVID-19 coronavirus infection occurs when you have surgery or whilst in hospital, this could either make your recovery more difficult, or increase your risk of serious illness and death. In some circumstances this could mean that the risk of surgery may be too high for us to offer the surgery, but for those patients that we do offer surgery to, we will do everything we can to perform your operation safely. We will listen to your concerns and discuss them with you.

Considering the extra risks of surgery due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, you may wish to delay your operation, and we would understand your reasons for this. However, we don't know how long the pandemic conditions may go on for or whether a second wave will occur, and if so, when. There may be very long delays if waiting for COVID-19 "free" conditions. Future dates for surgery may also take longer than normal to arrange. These delays could make surgery more difficult or less successful.

These are examples of the ways in which your surgical care may be different to normal

Before your operation

- Most of your consultations will occur by telephone or by letter.
- The added risks of getting coronavirus will be discussed and in some cases this may change treatment options.
- Your pre-anaesthetic assessment may be done by telephone with a nurse, and possibly an anaesthetist too.
- We will arrange for you to have coronavirus testing approximately 72 hours before your operation by taking a virus nose and throat swab. Your operation is likely to be postponed if you test positive or are unwell. Unfortunately this

test is not always accurate and you might be developing COVID-19 coronavirus infection even if the test is negative.

- In addition, if you are having major surgery, you may require a CT scan of your chest the day before surgery, to ensure there are no changes associated with COVID-19 coronavirus infection. Your procedure is likely to be postponed if the CT scan is abnormal.
- Unless surgery is an emergency, whilst at home waiting for the procedure you will be asked to ensure strict 'Shielding' for 2 weeks before your admission to hospital as per Public Health England (PHE) guidance against COVID-19 coronavirus.. This should lower the risk of being exposed to the virus as much as possible. During these 2 weeks you should contact us and report if there are any new problems such as onset of fever, cough or flu-like illness in yourself or any member of your household.

Your operation

- Your operation may not take place on the hospital site that you were expecting. We are operating on NHS patients at the Nuffield Hospital in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Rowley Hall Hospital in Stafford, as well as the Royal Stoke University Hospital in Stoke-on-Trent and County Hospital in Stafford.
- Circumstances will be very different in hospital. Wards will be reorganised to provide areas that are as coronavirus free as possible. Staff will be wearing protective equipment such as surgical masks and visors to provide added protection from the virus for all patients and staff.
- You may not meet your surgeons until the day of your treatment, and they might not be the ones you were expecting. They will, however, be experienced and trained to perform your operation.
- Unfortunately, it is unlikely that your family and friends will be able to visit you whilst you are in hospital.

After your operation

- We will discharge you as soon as it is safe, and as far as possible we will follow you up by telephone.