13 November 2020
New information inside

THE ME ASSOCIATION

MEA INFORMATION ON

Reducing the risk of catching Coronavirus if you have ME/CFS

by Dr Charles Shepherd

13TH NOVEMBER 2020 UPDATE

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The Covid situation continues to evolve rapidly. England is currently back in lockdown and Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, are each observing their own restriction measures. Local alert systems are also in place in some areas and many people are advised to stay at home and to work from home - with the notable exception of those attending schools, colleges, and universities where exceptions are applicable.

The death toll from Covid has now passed 50,000 in the UK which is more than for any other country in Europe. The current measures are designed to help put a brake on the spread of the virus and, while vaccines are now in full development and national inoculation programmes may be available in early 2021, the situation remains a significant concern.

Most people with ME/CFS should be regarded as clinically vulnerable and will need to stringently follow the latest Government advice. However, there will be those who have other serious medical conditions and may be considered clinically extremely vulnerable and, in England at least, will have been advised to adopt shielding measures.

The ME Association will be updating this leaflet as soon as it can, and will continue to share the latest news and information on its website and social media platforms. If you are in any doubt about what you should be doing, especially if you develop symptoms that you suspect might be Covid-19, please consult the Government websites:

England: https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus

Northern Ireland: https://tinyurl.com/yby7h7h4

Scotland: https://tinyurl.com/vth7xtd

Wales: https://gov.wales/coronavirus

REDUCING THE RISK

People with ME/CFS are already in a vulnerable/high risk group when it comes to catching this infection - mainly because it is highly likely to cause an exacerbation of existing symptoms, or a more persisting relapse.

The general risk from catching coronavirus also increases further if you have any of the factors below that are being identified as likely to make people more vulnerable to the infection. In particular:

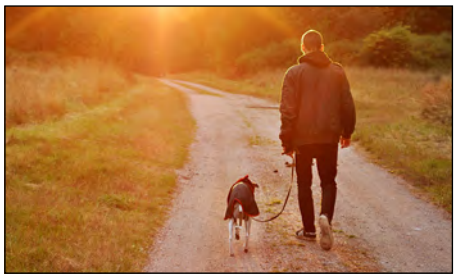
- Age over 70 years
- Male
- Obesity
- Black, Asian or minority ethnic background
- Having other chronic medical conditions – e.g. coronary artery disease, diabetes, respiratory disease
- Vitamin D deficiency

In addition, there are a number of social, work and demographic situations which make people more likely to catch the infection:

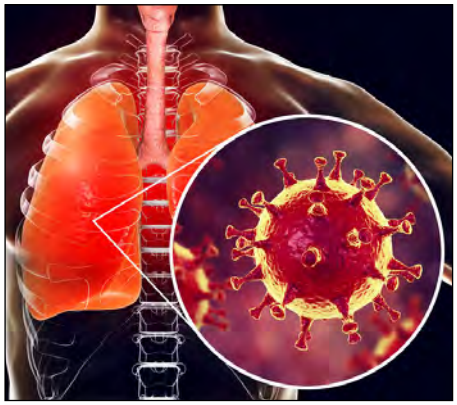
- Having a high risk occupation - working in health and social care, retail, and public transport
- Spending all or much of your working time indoors away from home where a lot of people gather in places such as shops or offices
- Living in a a part of the UK where there have been a disproportionate number of cases of COVID-19
- Living in a residential or care home

So it's important for everyone with ME/CFS to do all they can to reduce the risk of catching this infection. This means adopting a way of living that is based on individual circumstances and individual risk factors.

- **Almost zero risk** - staying at home, not going anywhere, and not meeting anyone else

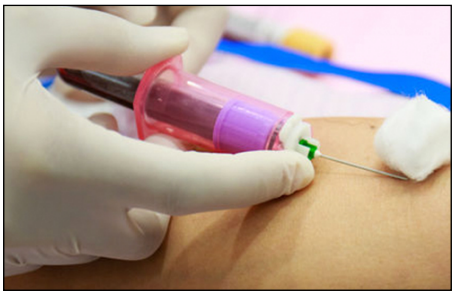


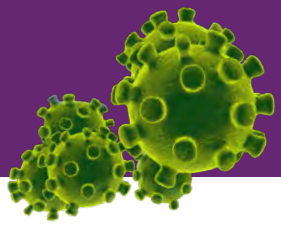
- **Low risk** - staying at home for most of the time but going out for a walk or an occasional visit to the shops
- **Higher risk** – leaving the house and going to work or school, or using public transport, or living with people who are going to work or school or using public transport



Below is a 10 point guide to the most important measures that will help to prevent you catching this infection.

The basis for this guidance is very simple. People who are infected pass on the virus in tiny droplets that are spread from the mouth during coughing, spluttering and even breathing. Viral droplets can also be passed on by people who are displaying no obvious symptoms. So a friend, or neighbour, or caller at the door, who looks and feels well could still be infected and spreading the infection. These virus laden particles then land on surfaces where they remain (for up to 72 hours on some hard surfaces) and can be picked up if someone touches the infected surface. An infected hand or finger then touches the eyes, mouth or nose and the virus enters the body.





TEN POINT GUIDE COVERS

1. STAY AT HOME

Although the advice here has changed to Stay Alert in England, other regions of the UK are still advising people to Stay at Home. For most people with ME/CFS, **Stay at Home** will be the most important thing you can do - as this should eliminate almost all contact with people who are infected and surfaces that are infected.

2. SOCIAL DISTANCING

The guidance here is to keep at least 2-metres from other people. But there is good research evidence to indicate that tiny viral particles can travel further than 2-metres, especially when an infected person is coughing or spluttering,

Consequently, I have chosen to try and keep a 4-metre distance where possible. And if you do meet people that you are not living with, try to avoid direct face-to-face conversations.

3. DON'T TOUCH SURFACES OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

If you are out of the home environment try to avoid touching any sort of surface, especially hard surfaces where lots of other people will have put their fingers, as well. High risk surfaces include ATM machines, door handles, hand rails, supermarket trolleys and anything that people touch on public transport. And avoid cash transactions in shops wherever possible.

4. DON'T TOUCH YOUR FACE

It's not easy – but if you are outside the house try to resist touching your face, especially eyes, nose or mouth with your fingers – which may have been in contact with a virus infected surface.

5. WASH YOUR HANDS REGULARLY WITH SOAP AND WATER

Washing your hands with soap and warm/hot water for at least 20 seconds is still the most effective way of removing the virus from your hands. Soap dissolves the fatty coating of the virus and makes it inactive. Hand washing means making sure that you wash between your fingers and your finger tips with the soap. Dry your hands properly afterwards (with either a paper towel or one that isn't used by anyone else). Never use shared towels away from home.

Repeated hand washing can also dry out the skin and cause cracks. So it's worth using a good moisturiser cream after hand washing is done.

If you are out and about carry a bottle of alcohol-based (62% or more) hand sanitiser and possibly a pair of disposable gloves to use if you are going to be touching surfaces.

If someone comes to the home, a care worker for example, make sure they wash their hands when they come in and preferably when they leave.

6. POST, PARCELS AND SHOPPING

For some people with ME/CFS, these may be the only surfaces that you are dealing with that may be infected. Although the virus may not remain active for long on paper and cardboard I leave my post in a pile in the hall for a few days, then open it all at once on the floor and wash my hands afterwards. A modified approach can be used for online shopping when it is being delivered by van or by a neighbour.

7. STAY SAFE AWAY FROM HOME

If you decide to leave the house for a daily walk (as I do), or for going to the shops, maintaining social distancing is obviously very important. If you are lucky enough to live in an area with not many people around this a very low risk activity – as viral transmission out in the fresh air is far less likely than in a closed indoor area. If you are not so lucky, and can only do so in streets with plenty of people on them, this becomes a riskier thing to do.

Being away from home on crowded public transport, or in shops and offices with lots of people about, is a higher risk activity. If you are working indoors away from home try to have a window open to allow some fresh air in.

TEN POINT GUIDE

8. TAKE A VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENT

Many people with ME/CFS are deficient in the vitamin D - the so called sunshine vitamin. Vitamin D is essential for bone and muscle/mitochonrial health as well as immune system function and antiviral activity. There is growing evidence to indicate that being deficient in vitamin D increases the risk of developing a more serious COVID-19 infection.

So everyone with ME/CFS, especially those who do not go outside, should be taking a 10 microgram vitamin D supplement.

Medical reference: COVID-19 'ICU' risk is 20-fold greater in the Vitamin D Deficient. BAME, African Americans, the Older, Institutionalised and Obese, are at greatest risk. Sun and 'D'-supplementation – Game-changers? Research urgently required. **Read more here: https://tinyurl.com/y9kckufm**

9. FACE MASKS

Simple face masks may help to protect other people if you have a respiratory infection. But they will not provide much protection to you from catching an infection from someone else. They can even be counter-productive if you are touching them and moving them around because they are uncomfortable for long periods of time. The only type of mask to offer this level of protection is the type worn by health professionals.

10. MEETING A FRIEND OR RELATIVE

Not surprisingly, many people with ME/CFS are desperate to see a friend or relative, or new addition to the family. When/if this happens, the same approach to social distancing should be applied. And while children are largely immune from developing serious problems with COVID-19 infection, current research indicates that they can be infected without having any symptoms and so be vectors for further transmission.

So hugging your children or grandchildren is not a good idea at the moment!

MEA RESOURCES FOR COVID19 AND ME/CFS

- MEA Leaflet on post viral fatigue and post viral fatigue syndrome following COVID-19: **https://tinyurl.com/y97taquh**
- MEA Weekly Update Leaflet: **https://tinyurl.com/y7s677tc**
- MEA 'To Whom It May Concern' Letter covering vulnerability: **https://tinyurl.com/yckcfw8t**
- MEA Leaflet covering DWP: **https://tinyurl.com/ybc227p5 benefits**
- MEA leaflet covering Employment: **https://tinyurl.com/y8stm6xx**

NCVO MEMBER 2025

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

ME ASSOCIATION WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

We issued a statement to provide information on all aspects of our work and the services we provide. Almost all key activities are continuing as normal – the main change being that we have now closed Head Office in Buckingham and office staff are now working from home.

The main impact here is that we will not be able to send out any paper literature, purple books, or merchandise from the office for the foreseeable future. ME Connect – **the MEA telephone helpline** – remains operational with staff and volunteers available for information and support: **0808 801 0484.**

ME Association statement:
The ME Association and Coronavirus: New working arrangements: https://tinyurl.com/y9w9evr3

We will continue to do our very best to keep you informed through MEA website and social media announcements.

Please take care. Stay at home and stay safe.

THE ME ASSOCIATION

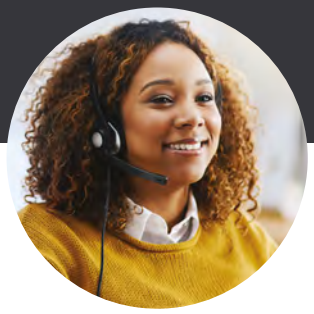
ME CONNECT

The Support and Information Service for people affected by ME/CFS/PVFS and Long Covid

3 WAYS TO GET IN TOUCH:
by phone, email or social media private message

Freephone 0808 801 0484

For opening hours visit:
meassociation.org.uk/me-connect



HERE TO LISTEN

We are here to listen, validate and empathise with any issues you might be facing.

VITAL SUPPORT

We are here to help you reach an informed decision.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

We provide a safe, confidential and understanding environment where you can be heard and understood.

We're here for you!

meconnect@meassociation.org.uk

X.com/meassociation

facebook.com/meassociation

instagram.com/meassociation