

Information for family/friends of those admitted to hospital with COVID-19

COVID-19 can cause minor to serious illness.

Your family member/friend has been admitted to hospital with COVID-19 so that we can monitor their breathing. Their breathing may need to be supported with oxygen and sometimes with a ventilator (artificial breathing). We will also help with any symptoms they may have.

This leaflet will explain what treatment they may receive, and what support will be available to them and you.

What treatment will they receive?

Alongside active measures to treat the disease, it is important that we reduce the distress that they may experience. This is done through treating symptoms:

- *Breathlessness* can be improved by keeping as calm and relaxed as possible, but if breathlessness gets worse, we will use medication to help with this. Morphine is the most common medicine used. Although usually given for pain, morphine can be used safely to relieve the feeling of breathlessness.
- *Cough* can also be relieved by morphine.
- *Anxiety* can be common; medicines used to help with this symptom include lorazepam and midazolam.
- *Restlessness* can occur if a fever develops and this can be controlled using paracetamol.

All medicines will be given regularly and when needed. Medicines can be given as an injection either through a vein or under the skin if necessary.

In the most serious cases, COVID-19 can severely affect the lungs, stopping them from working normally. A ventilator may be used to move air into and out of the lungs to help with breathing. A ventilator may be used for several days until the lungs are able to work properly again.

Making decisions

Difficult decisions about the care your family member/friend receives may need to be made rapidly by the medical teams. For example, when to start ventilation or whether to restart the heart if it stops. Please let the medical team know whether you have had these discussions with your family member/friend already and what they said. If you are unsure, then please discuss with one of the medical team. Many of the conversations with the doctors and nurses will have to take place on the telephone and we recognise that this will be difficult. Please make sure we have your correct contact details and let the ward staff know if you wish to be kept informed.

How can I communicate with them?

There are strict isolation rules in place both outside and inside the hospital, which means that you may not be allowed to visit. If visiting the hospital, you will have to wear personal protective equipment (otherwise known as PPE – face masks etc.). Where possible, ward staff will help you communicate by telephone or video calls.



This information leaflet was compiled by Dr Sabrina Bajwah (Cicely Saunders Institute, King's College London) with extensive input from co-authors and patient/carer groups to accompany the ERJ editorial "Managing the supportive care needs of those affected with COVID-19". Please cite this editorial as follows:

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Can I get additional support?

We understand that this is a difficult time. You may want to talk about how you feel. Please ask a member of the ward staff to contact any of the following support services that are available to you:

List of local hospital support services: