

## COVID-19 Information Resources

Should you have any questions about your personal health situation, please contact your rheumatologist or other healthcare provider.

### What is COVID-19?

The World Health Organization has developed a video that explains COVID-19, how it is transmitted and signs and symptoms of the disease

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOV1aBVYKGA&feature=youtu.be>)

### How can I protect myself?

Physical distancing is important especially to people with compromised immune systems. Physical distancing means reducing close contact with people including:

- avoiding non-essential gatherings
- avoiding common greetings, such as handshakes
- keeping a distance of at least 2 arms lengths (approximately 2 metres) from others

For more information, visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>.

## Medications

### I lost my job and access to my health benefits. How will I pay for my medications?

If you have lost your job and access to private insurance that reimburses the cost of prescription medications, you might be eligible for the public drug program in your province.

### Can I refill my medications?

Insurance often limits how often medications can be reimbursed. In addition to these usual restrictions, many provinces are only allowing pharmacists to dispense a thirty day of supply of medications. The Canadian Pharmacists Association is recommending pharmacies do this to ensure Canadians have an adequate supply of medications. Talk to your pharmacist if you wish to request additional medication.

### I'm worried about getting enough of my medications to get through the pandemic. Have there been any changes to how public drug plans manage medication renewals to make it easier for me?

Controlled substances, such as opioids used for treating chronic pain, are typically only allowed to be refilled once a minimum time has elapsed. To allow people to self-isolate safely while keeping access to pain medications, Health Canada has allowed pharmacists to extend prescriptions of these controlled substances as well as issue verbal orders (i.e. over the phone) to extend or refill a prescription. Pharmacists can also transfer prescriptions of controlled substances to other pharmacists and pharmacy employees can deliver prescriptions of controlled substances to a patient's home or other location where they may be.

## **Can I continue taking Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAID's)?**

Based on currently available information, the World Health Organization and Health Canada say that there is not enough scientific evidence that Ibuprofen worsens COVID-19 symptoms. Health Canada has recently stated that there is no scientific evidence that establishes a link between ibuprofen, or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), and the worsening of COVID-19 symptoms.

<https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1240409217997189128>

According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, Ibuprofen can also continue to be taken by children to treat children with COVID-19 infection.

<https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/can-nsaids-be-used-in-children-when-covid-19-is-suspected>

## **I take Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) for Systemic Lupus Erythematosus or Rheumatoid Arthritis. Are Hydroxychloroquine and Chloroquine the same medication? Is it safe to keep taking Hydroxychloroquine?**

The media and government officials across the world have been reporting that Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) may be a possible treatment for COVID-19. Hydroxychloroquine is used to treat Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) and Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) and is prescribed at 200 mg once per day or 200 mg twice per day. At these doses, Hydroxychloroquine is generally well tolerated by patients. Chloroquine is a different medication and is not typically used for treating SLE and RA.

## **I'm worried about accessing Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) since it could be used to treat COVID-19. What should I do?**

Since Hydroxychloroquine is showing potential to treat people with COVID-19, there could be an increased demand for the medication. The government and healthcare professional associations recognize that people with SLE and RA need access to Hydroxychloroquine and are taking steps to ensure there is enough supply. Currently, most government and health care professional organizations support the use of Hydroxychloroquine only for clinical trials as there is not enough evidence to recommend its routine use for COVID-19.

<https://www.opatoday.com/Media/Default/Default/2020-03-23%20OPA-OMA-RNAO%20Statement%20to%20Members%20v2.pdf>

As a precaution, you can take several steps to manage medication supply:

- Contact your pharmacy for refills well before you run out of medication. Try to request your refill as early as possible to give more time for your pharmacist.
- Be sure to tell your pharmacist the reason you are taking the medication. Some places give pharmacists the discretion to decide which prescriptions to prioritize.
- If the drug is not available at the pharmacy, ask the pharmacist for help in finding other nearby pharmacies who may have some of the medication on hand. If you can't find any at nearby pharmacies, contact your doctor.
- If your pharmacy can't fill your prescription due to limited supply, ask if you be contacted as soon as new medication comes in.

## Work

### **I work in an essential services job and I'm worried about exposure to the virus. Since I'm taking medications that suppress my immune system, what can I do?**

The decision to advise an employer of the risk of severe outcomes if you contract coronavirus is personal and considers a number of factors like trust and the existing relationship. If you feel comfortable speaking with your manager, advise them of the higher risk and discuss what steps can be taken to protect your health. Some options include taking extra precautions in the workplace such as reducing social contact and/or using an alternative work arrangement like teleworking.

## Access to healthcare

### **I have an appointment with my rheumatologist coming up soon. Do I need to go physically into the office?**

We understand that some doctors are offering telephone or video-based visits to patients. In addition, some provinces are offering reimbursement of telephone visits or waiving the costs of video-based medical appointments. Please speak with your rheumatologist for more information.

### **Will my infusion appointment go ahead as scheduled?**

We have heard some situations where regularly scheduled infusions may not go ahead as scheduled. In some cases, there may be an alternative like moving to a self-injectable medication, if one is available. Contact the patient support program or your rheumatologist to confirm the infusion appointment is going ahead as planned and see if alternative arrangements need to be made.

## Staying healthy

### **How can I manage stress and anxiety?**

The World Health Organization (<https://www.who.int/>) has developed an infographic that provides tips on managing stress during the pandemic. Advice includes:

- Talking with someone you trust
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle as much as possible
- Getting the facts
- Lessen time watching or listening to media coverage

*Lupus Canada expresses their appreciation to the Canadian Arthritis Patient Alliance (CAPA) ([www.arthritispatient.ca](http://www.arthritispatient.ca)) for allowing us to share some of their COVID-19 resource information on our website.*