

Arthritis and COVID-19 – What you need to know

Date: March 13, 2020

There are confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand and Arthritis New Zealand encourages people to stay up to date with Ministry of Health information about it.

The following advice is from New Zealand Rheumatologist Association rheumatologist Prof. Andrew Harrison.

The risk of catching COVID-19 in New Zealand is low and at present people may continue to go to work, school and other public places. This may change and is why we encourage people to stay up to date with Ministry information.

Government's dedicated COVID-19 website - www.covid19.govt.nz

We encourage people to follow advice to wash hands thoroughly, avoid contact with potential cases and have early vaccination for seasonal flu.

Patients taking methotrexate are minimally, if at all, at increased risk of infection, including flu and COVID-19. There is a small increased risk of infection for patients taking biologic therapies.

Please note that:

1. The likelihood of catching COVID-19 is low, and
2. any infection risk for arthritis patients is linked more to arthritis itself than to the disease-modifying drugs used for arthritis.
3. If you have a flare of arthritis you may require steroids, which increases the risk of infection more than any other drug used in arthritis.

It is therefore important that you keep taking your arthritis treatment, including biological therapies.

Patients on biologics who become feverish should seek advice from their GP and/or rheumatologist, and stop taking the biologic until the fever has resolved. This is the standard advice for patients on biologics who develop any infection.