

## **Important Patient Information about Corona Virus for those seeking Fertility Treatment**

This leaflet is intended to give patients information about Corona virus, how this might affect their fertility treatment and help them stay safe and reassured.

If you are considering delaying your treatment we recommend you speak to clinic staff about your individual circumstances.

### **Introduction**

Corona viruses are a group of viruses that are common across the world. In 2019 a novel (new) strain of Corona virus was identified in Wuhan, China and quickly spread across the world. Typical symptoms of this new corona virus included fever, a cough and shortness of breath that could progress to a severe pneumonia causing breathing difficulties. The virus had mutated over time and is now known to cause a wide range of symptoms. The disease caused by this corona virus is called COVID and the national vaccination program began in the winter of 2019/2020.

For further information on corona virus and a list of symptoms please visit the NHS and Government websites for the most up to date information. The links are included at the end of this leaflet.

### **Risks associated with corona virus to the general population**

Many people infected with this novel corona virus have only mild flu-like symptoms but unfortunately a proportion will die with the infection. It is thought that a significant number of infected people have no symptoms at all (are asymptomatic) but that these people are still capable of passing the virus on to others. Generally, this corona virus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

### **Background**

During the first part of the corona virus crisis fertility clinics were instructed to stop treatments by 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 fertility clinics were told that they would be able to apply to restart treatments after 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020. In order to be able to offer treatments safely whilst the country is still affected by the corona virus clinics have to have a new treatment strategy put into place before treatments can restart. This leaflet forms part of this strategy and it is very important that all patients read and understand it.

### **Reducing of the risk of catching and spreading corona virus**

There are things we can all do to reduce the likelihood of contracting the virus or passing it on to others. On the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 legislation issued by the government at earlier stages of the pandemic stopped being mandatory, though the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust (SaTH) and the fertility clinic are able to insist on their own rules being followed.

Most importantly **you MUST NOT enter the department if you are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, even if this is unconfirmed.**

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We still expect you to wear a face covering in our healthcare setting (unless you are exempt) if this is in line with Trust guidance at the time.

We strongly suggest you act in a cautious manner whilst infection rates remain high to minimise the chance of becoming infected and this disrupting your treatment or the treatment of others. You will be asked to sign a declaration (Code of Conduct) to state that you will abide by the clinic's rules at work and in your private life prior to and during treatment.

We no longer require you to wait in your car to be called up for your appointment however **please do not come up to the waiting room until 5 minutes before your appointment is due** to start. If the waiting room is busy or the clinic is running late you may be asked to return to your car until we are ready to see you. Please be respectful of the requests of our staff if this is the case.

Please continue to thoroughly wash your hands regularly for at least 20 seconds with soap and water and not to touch your face to help prevent the spread of infection. Please wash your hands before every appointment. You are strongly advised to wash your hands again before you leave the department.

The clinic will continue to work differently to minimise the contact you have with both staff and other patients. Some of your appointments may be over the telephone or by video call.

### **Corona Virus during pregnancy**

In March 2020 the Government assigned pregnant women to a higher risk category than the general public and advised them to self-isolate after 28 weeks gestation. Although the advice to shield from 28 weeks has now been withdrawn the government still recommend a precautionary approach as you are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill or having a pre-term birth if you contract COVID-19.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) have found no evidence that this novel corona virus causes any specific complications in pregnant women or affects their unborn babies. You can read the most up to date information using the link at the end of this document.

### **Waiting Times**

We have reduced our treatment numbers slightly whilst we work in a way that ensures adequate physical distancing between patients. This could mean that waits can be a little longer than anticipated for some patients who are deemed at lower risk of losing their fertility. We will continue to prioritise patients requiring fertility preservation (e.g. due to cancer treatment) and women with a low ovarian reserve.

### **Higher Risk Patients**

People with certain conditions (e.g. diabetes, high blood pressure and those requiring immunosuppressant drugs) are deemed to be at higher risk of having complications if they contract corona virus. Please ensure you inform clinic staff if you have any of the health conditions listed by the NHS that may make you more vulnerable to this corona virus.

If you have previously had confirmed or suspected corona virus which continues to affect you please let staff know for our records.

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**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Please expect our staff to be wearing PPE at your appointments. This is to protect you as well as us. The type of PPE they wear is dependant on the risk and how well we can maintain an acceptable social distance from you, it may differ depending on what sort of appointment you have. It will be in accordance with our hospital Trust's current guidelines.

You will be supplied with a surgical mask to wear during your appointments if that is in line with Trust advice at the time.

**Is treatment compulsory?**

No. All patients have the option to decline or postpone (delay) the offer of treatment.

NHS patients who decide not to be treated will be referred back to their GP and will require a new referral if they want to return for fertility treatment in future. Please bear in mind that NHS patients have to comply with certain criteria e.g. age so you may not want to postpone it for too long. Also, in many cases, your chance of successful treatment will decline with age. Please discuss any concerns with clinic staff so we can give you individual advice.

Patients funding their own treatment will need to refer to the financial declaration which details cancellation charges and other charges that may apply if they withdraw from treatment.

**Patient Testing and Self Isolating Code of Conduct**

You will be asked to sign an agreement (Code of Conduct) confirming that you will not attend the unit if you have any symptoms of coronavirus infection and understand the information you have been given.

Our staff have signed up to a similar Code of Conduct agreeing to the same. This is to protect you and our staff, and to ensure our service can continue for the benefit of all our patients.

We will now only be swabbing patients routinely prior to treatment if this is in line with SaTH guidance at the time. We may ask you to be swabbed and tested if we believe you may be infected.

Self-isolation prior to the procedure is no longer mandatory. However, you are strongly advised to avoid social situations and contact with COVID symptomatic individuals in the run up to your treatment. Patients or partners who become symptomatic of COVID or have a positive LFT cannot attend the fertility unit and your treatment will be abandoned. The fertility unit follows Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust guidance on self isolation and this may be subject to change.

**What happens if we develop corona virus symptoms during treatment?**

You must not attend the fertility unit if you have any symptoms of coronavirus as listed by the NHS or have had a positive LFT in the last 10 days. If you or your partner develop corona virus symptoms during the course of your treatment, your treatment is likely be abandoned unless we can confirm, by PCR test, that you do not have the virus. Be aware that treatment

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may also have to be abandoned/postponed if you are unable to attend your appointments because you are symptomatic or have had a positive LFT.

Patients funding their own treatment must be aware that if treatment is abandoned/postponed then appointments that have already taken place and medication that have been delivered must still be paid for and cannot be refunded. Unused medication can be used during your next cycle if stored correctly. The rest of your treatment payment will be held in credit for when we are able to recommence your treatment.

If you develop symptoms after egg collection but before your scheduled embryo transfer your embryos will be frozen for embryo transfer at a later date.

**The clinic has the right to refuse to continue treatment if we suspect you have symptoms of Covid-19 and to refuse future treatment if we believe you have deliberately concealed symptoms and therefore put others at risk.**

### **Pregnancy and the Covid Vaccination**

Although there is limited safety data for COVID-19 vaccinations, there is no increased risk in pregnant women compared to other live vaccines. If you choose to have the COVID-19 vaccine this will not delay your treatment with us.

Information about Pregnancy and the COVID vaccination can be found on the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) website and the FAQ page. The links are available at the end of this leaflet.

If offered a vaccination during or following fertility treatment please tell the vaccinator that you are or may be pregnant as this may affect which brand of vaccine you are given.

Please be aware that the JCVI and RCOG guidance is under regular review and recommendations for patients trying to achieve a pregnancy could change at any time. These statements and article can be read using the links on the corona virus page of our website

<https://www.shropshireivf.nhs.uk/news-archive/covid-19-information/>

### **Useful links:**

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

<https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/>

[COVID-19 vaccines, pregnancy and breastfeeding \(rcog.org.uk\)](https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/)

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