

Suggestions from the American College of Rheumatology for Patients During the COVID-19 Pandemic: When and How to Seek Care

Introduction for providers

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR) has compiled some common patient questions and answers regarding access to care during the COVID-19 pandemic. These may be helpful to providers and their staff as they address patient concerns. Clinical guidance from the ACR for the treatment of rheumatology patients during the COVID-19 pandemic are available [here](#). Providers are encouraged, of course, to tailor responses to fit individual patients, practices and local circumstances.

Information for Patients

Should I go in for my routine rheumatology visit?

If you are taking medicine prescribed by your rheumatologist or rheumatology health professional, you'll need to continue to have at least some monitoring and follow-up even during COVID-19. Depending on local conditions and regulations, many rheumatology clinics are delaying routine visits or conducting them remotely by video or telephone. If you have not heard from your provider's office, you should check before you go in.

Should I go into the lab for my routine blood work?

Again, it's best to check with your provider first. Your rheumatologist or rheumatology health professional will take a number of factors (dose and duration of your medicine, prior lab abnormalities, accommodations for social distancing at your lab, etc.) into account and suggest when and where to get blood work done. Discuss with your provider which lab in your community and what time of day might be safest (you may need to schedule an appointment at the lab to avoid crowding). Some communities may be equipped for drive up services. Sometimes delaying your lab tests may be appropriate.

Should I go in for my infusion? Injection?

For many patients with inflammatory diseases, continuing infusion and injection treatments is necessary to prevent a flare. For some patients, flares are treated with prednisone which may confer additional risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. For still other patients, such as those with well controlled disease or very high risk of

complications should they develop COVID-19, a delay in therapy may be safest. Therefore, it's advisable to have a conversation with your rheumatologist or rheumatology health professional before going in for an infusion or injection.

Can I fill my prescriptions without going to the pharmacy?

Many pharmacies are offering free delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alternatively, your pharmacy may be able to mail your prescription to you if it is not urgent. Check with your local pharmacy to make arrangements.

What if I think I have COVID-19?

Your primary care provider is probably the best and first place to call for guidance. The CDC recommends self-quarantine in your home if your symptoms are mild. If you think you need to be seen, contact your primary care or urgent care or emergency department by phone BEFORE you go in. They will have instructions for how to proceed with testing and access care while minimizing exposure to others.

You should also contact your rheumatologist or rheumatology health professional if you think you have COVID-19 or if you have a confirmed case of COVID-19. Some medicines routinely prescribed to rheumatology patients should be discontinued in the setting of infection with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19). Other medicines can be continued. Your rheumatologist or rheumatology health professional will assess the particulars of your situation and provide specific advice.

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