

CORONAVIRUS INFECTION IN OLDER PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND: SAVING MORE LIVES AND GIVING MORE RESPECT

Here are four questions, which many older people are asking, the best answers known to us at present, and three urgent demands on the Government. The questions relate to older people who are in reasonably good health. Older people with chronic conditions which put them at additional risk need more individually tailored advice which many of them have already received.

QUESTIONS

1. I'm over 70 but in reasonably good health. How ill should I be before I phone 111 for advice?
2. What will 111 do when I get through to them?
3. Can I choose to stay at home even if advised to go to hospital, and what help can I expect to get if I decide to stay at home?
4. Should I try to decide now whether or not I want to go to hospital if advised to do so, and whether or not I would rather come home if I become too ill to be treated in hospital, or wait to make these difficult decisions until I become ill?

ANSWERS

Q.1: If you have a new cough and/or a fever (= you feel feverish, or a thermometer, if you have one, shows your temperature is raised), but don't have shortness of breath or any breathing difficulty, there's no need to call 111. Drink plenty of fluids, take paracetamol when you need to. Stay at home for seven days. If you have shortness of breath or any breathing difficulty, phone 111 for advice straight away. Also phone 111 if your cough, fever or other symptoms get worse during the next seven days, or haven't improved by the end of the seven days. This advice is based on the 'NHS inform' website.

If you become less well while waiting to get through to 111 and it's in working hours, try calling your GP for advice. If you can't get through to your GP, or it's not working hours, you may want to discuss what you do next with a relative, friend or neighbour to help you decide whether you should consider calling 999.

Q.2: They will assess your symptoms over the phone, to decide if this is likely to be corona virus, how severe your illness is, and find out what support if any you have at home. They will give advice about what you should do (for example stay at home, call an ambulance, etc.). They should have access to your Advance Care Plan if you've made one with your GP.

Q.3: You are fully entitled to choose to remain at home even if advised to go to hospital. What support you will get at home depends on what's available in your area.

Q.4: You should be finding out from your GP now what's available and what medical help you would be able to get if you decide to remain at home. This would be part of discussing your Advanced Care Plan with your GP. You can contact your GP now for this discussion - don't wait until you are ill. Your GP will make a record of your Advance Care Plan, which will be made available to the NHS 111 service, so they will have access to your Plan if you phone them for advice. You should also discuss your Advance Care Plan with your family/those who support you. It might not be possible for you to stay at home if you don't have enough community/family support or if your symptoms can't be adequately managed at home. And you can always change your mind about what you want to do at the time.

URGENT DEMANDS ON THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

1. The Government should ensure that NHS 111 is adequately resourced to respond to all calls for advice within 30 minutes.
2. The Government should ensure that GPs are adequately resourced to encourage and support all of their patients who are over 70 to make Advance Care Plans if they wish to.
3. The Government should ensure that the above guidance, or improvements on it, is made widely available to all people over 70.

Please share this information with friends and family and if you agree with the demands forward them to your MSP and local councillors.