

Dexamethasone for Covid-19

During your stay, you have been given a corticosteroid called Dexamethasone for Covid-19. Evidence from recent trials shows it can save the lives of some patients. It is generally believed to be safe. The length of the treatment is short and even at high doses - it is not associated with serious side effects.

A potential side effect is high blood glucose levels (hyperglycaemia). Blood glucose will return to normal levels after you finish taking it. In some cases (particularly if you have pre-existing risk factors for type 2 diabetes), the high glucose levels may persist longer. Previously undiagnosed diabetes may also be found by taking the steroids.

If you do not have pre-existing diabetes

Dexamethasone may not cause any long term effects. However, after discharge from hospital the steroid-induced hyperglycaemia effects can last up to 36 hours and beyond. Once discharged, if you experience symptoms of high blood glucose levels including:

- increased urination (peeing)
- increased thirst
- weight loss (sudden onset)
- increased tiredness and lack of energy
- fungal infection (Thrush)

Please contact your GP surgery, to arrange a blood test. It will be taken 3 months after your discharge from hospital to check that glucose levels have returned to normal.

If you have pre-existing diabetes

Your usual diabetes medication may need to be increased - as the effects can last 36 hours or more after discharge once Dexamethasone has stopped.

The stress of Covid-19 on your body can also increase blood glucose levels.

If your blood glucose levels remain higher than 15 mmol/l, please contact the helpline.

If discharged on insulin or treatment has changed during your stay, this may lead to hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels) after Dexamethasone has stopped - usually after 36 hours and you recovering from Covid-19.

If blood glucose levels are lower than 4 mmol/l, adjustments to medication may be needed. If this happens, please contact the helpline.

Blood glucose monitoring at home

If you needed insulin in hospital and blood glucose levels on discharge remain elevated (above 15 mmol/l), you will be given a blood glucose meter. If you weren't shown how to use it, please read the instructions in the pack or watch the video. Call the helpline if you have any concerns. Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPNcjuqRmo8>

If your blood glucose levels are higher than 18 mmol/l, contact the helpline.

If your blood glucose levels are always 4-12 mmol/l fasting and before meals, you can stop monitoring. Please contact the helpline so we can discharge you from our virtual ward.

Diabetes team helpline numbers

Royal Derby Hospital: 01332 787671

Queens Hospital Burton: 01283 593113

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