

# Dexamethasone, Covid-19, and increased glucose levels

## Information for patients and their carers

This leaflet is for patients who have experienced increased glucose levels, due to dexamethasone treatment for Covid 19. If after reading this leaflet you have any questions or concerns, please contact your GP.

- What is Dexamethasone?
- Information for patients who do not have pre-existing diabetes
- Information for patients who do have pre-existing diabetes
- Insulin on discharge from hospital
- Monitoring your blood glucose at home

### What is Dexamethasone?

Your treatment for Covid 19 has included a steroid called Dexamethasone. Evidence has shown this medication can save the lives of some people who have Covid 19. It is generally considered to be safe as patients do not take it for long, and even in high doses this medication is not associated with serious side effects.



However, one potential side effect of Dexamethasone is higher blood glucose levels (hyperglycaemia). This is usually temporary and blood glucose levels should return to normal after you finish taking the drug. You may find your high glucose levels continue for longer, particularly if you have pre-existing factors for Type 2 Diabetes.

Previously undiagnosed diabetes may also be identified.



### Information for patients who do not have pre-existing diabetes

Dexamethasone should not cause any long term side effects. However, steroid-induced hyperglycaemia can last up to 36 hours after you finish taking it.

Once discharged from hospital, if you experience any of the following symptoms of high glucose levels, please contact your GP, who will arrange for you to have a blood test.

- Pass more urine
- Feel increasingly thirsty
- Experience sudden weight loss
- Increased tiredness and lack of energy
- Fungal infection (such as genital thrush).

### Information for patients who have pre-existing diabetes

Your usual diabetes medication may have been increased due to the effects of both Dexamethasone and Covid 19.

If your blood glucose levels remain higher than 15mmol/L, please contact your GP or 111.

Being discharged from hospital on insulin or having your diabetes medication changed during your hospital admission can lead to hypoglycaemia (low blood glucose levels). This often happens about 36 hours after stopping Dexamethasone.

If your blood glucose levels are lower than 4mmol/L, changes to your medication may be needed. If this happens please contact your GP or 111.

You will be given the following leaflets by a member of staff. This information is also available on the Diabetes UK web site [www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes)

- Sick day rules
- Hypoglycaemia Awareness
- DVLA

### Covid 19 can:

- Cause severe insulin resistance and insulin deficiency, which can cause DKA (Diabetic ketoacidosis) in people with Type 1 Diabetes and occasionally in those with Type 2 Diabetes. DKA is a serious complication of Type 1 Diabetes and less commonly Type 2 Diabetes.

DKA happens when your blood glucose level is very high and acidic substances called ketones build up to dangerous levels in your body.

- Trigger new onset diabetes.
- Result in the need for new or increased insulin therapy, often at very high doses.

## Monitoring your blood glucose at home

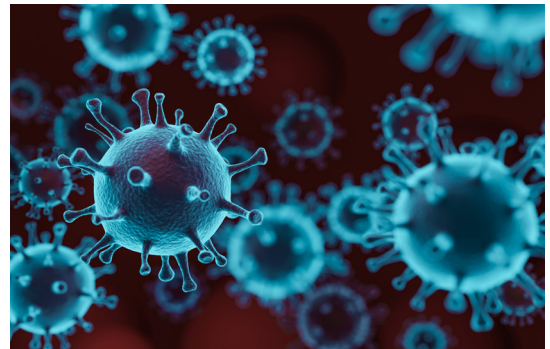
If you have been discharged from hospital with insulin you will also be given a blood glucose meter. If you were not shown how to use it, please read the instructions in the pack. You can also follow the link below, then click on the picture of the meter you have been given for step by step and video guidance [www.glucorx.co.uk/manuals-and-videos/](http://www.glucorx.co.uk/manuals-and-videos/)

Continue to monitor your blood glucose twice a day, before breakfast and before your evening meal – unless you have been advised otherwise by your healthcare professional, until your blood glucose levels return to normal levels (between 4 and 12 mmol/L). These targets are for people with and without diabetes.

If your blood glucose levels are higher than 15mmol/L, please refer to your sick day rules leaflet and contact your GP or 111.

## Further information

- **Diabetes UK**  
Offers general health, diet, and emotional support.  
Open: Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm  
Helpline: 0345 12 32 399  
Web: [www.diabetes.org.uk/](http://www.diabetes.org.uk/)



For medical support please contact your GP or 111.

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients**

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

**Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments** please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email [ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital.** Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

**Further patient leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site [www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation](http://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation)