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March 13, 2020

Dear ARBDA Community,

The Entire Team at Arthritis, Rheumatic, & Back Disease Associates wants you to be aware of steps that we're taking to ensure your safety in our offices as well as provide some general guidance to address a number of the questions/concerns we've received regarding the COVID-19 virus.

Your ARBDA Physicians are continuously monitoring the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), and other public health institution(s) information to review any updated information & adapt our protocols (if necessary). Our Physician & Administrative Teams lead our efforts to ensure that all ARBDA locations continue to serve the community at the same level of care you have come to expect from us, especially during this time of uncertainty. To that end, some of the steps that we're taking to ensure the safety of our patients & staff members include: drastically increasing the frequency and duration of our disinfection protocols, providing staff & patient education on proper respiratory hygiene and hand washing techniques, and identifying patients who may be at high risk of contracting the illness caused by the COVID-19 virus to prevent any possible transmission (among many others).

However, all of those efforts would be incomplete if we did not also ask for your help. If you are scheduled for an appointment or infusion AND answer YES to ANY of the following:



- Have traveled to a HIGH-RISK area in the LAST 2 weeks.
- Are CURRENTLY feeling changes from hot to cold that could indicate a fever or have a temperature 100.4°F (or higher), OR
- CURRENTLY have a cough where you produce sputum or any other type of fluid, OR
- CURRENTLY have ANY shortness of breath (that's not part of an ongoing medical issue like asthma COPD).

- **PLEASE RESCHEDULE YOUR APPOINTMENT FOR WHEN YOU'RE FEELING BETTER.**
- Rheumatology offices are **not** equipped to evaluate or test for COVID-19.
- We **STRONGLY RECOMMEND** that you contact your Primary Care provider, Urgent Care Center, or local Emergency Room.

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We're often asked the following questions and hope that these general guidelines will be helpful for you – including those that relate to medicines which we may prescribe to you.

BASIC PRECAUTIONS → Reducing the spread of respiratory illness is the biggest step that anyone can take to combat infections. By helping to do your part in reducing the spread of COVID- 19 and other illnesses – you ensure that your fellow ARBDA patients are less likely to suffer the effects of infection.

BASIC PRECAUTIONS

COVID 19
CORONAVIRUS DISEASE

STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS

Help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** (Illustration of two people shaking hands with germs floating between them)
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.** (Illustration of a person coughing into a tissue)
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.** (Illustration of a hand touching a face with a red prohibition sign over it)
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.** (Illustration of hands being cleaned with a spray nozzle)
- Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care.** (Illustration of a house with a person in bed)
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.** (Illustration of hands being washed under a faucet)

For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

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** NOTE ** Due to the rapidly changing pattern of the current epidemic, these guidelines are meant simply as general information. We will attempt to provide updates as new information becomes available. However, given that the basic science involved in understanding the immune response to COVID-19 is rapidly changing – this information may change frequently, without notification, and is not meant to replace/supersede the advice of your Rheumatologist.
** Most Recent Update: 13 March 2020 at 1158am

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GUIDANCE FOR PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS:

** NOTE ** Please consult with your ARBDA physician PRIOR to stopping any treatment. The following guidance generally applies for patients currently taking:

- **PLAQUENIL**[®] (hydroxychloroquine)
 - **OTEZLA**[®] (apremilast)
 - **AZULFIDINE**[®] (sulfasalazine)
- **IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO STOP YOUR MEDICINE, EVEN IF YOU BECOME SICK.**
-
- **ENBREL**[®]
 - **HUMIRA**[®]
 - **REMICADE**[®]
 - **SIMPONI**[®] / **SIMPONI ARIA**[®]
 - **CIMZIA**[®]
 - **ORENCIA**[®]
 - **ACTEMRA**[®]
 - **KEVZARA**[®]
 - **RITUXAN**[®]
 - **XELJANZ**[®], **RINVOQ**[®]
 - **STELARA**[®]
 - **COSENTYX**[®]
 - **TALTZ**[®]
 - **BENLYSTA**[®]
- **USE BASIC PRECAUTIONS** - as you would if you are actively being treated for an infectious illness.
- If you are **SURE** that you were in close contact with someone who was **CONFIRMED** to be infected with COVID-19 and you do **NOT** have any symptoms → we recommend discussing this situation with your ARBDA physician.
- If **YOU** are **CONFIRMED** to be infected with COVID-19, stop taking your medicine until you feel well again and are cleared by a physician.
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- **OTREXUP**[®], **RASUVO**[®], **RHEUMATREX**[®]
(methotrexate)
 - **ARAVA**[®] (leflunomide)
 - **IMURAN**[®] (azathioprine)
 - **CellCept**[®] (mycophenolate mofetil)
- **USE BASIC PRECAUTIONS (AS ABOVE).**
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- **Chronic Steroids** (e.g., prednisone)
- **DO NOT STOP YOUR MEDICINE - EVEN IF YOU BECOME SICK.**
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- If you are taking medicine for osteoporosis (including **PROLIA**[®] or **RECLAST**[®]) – these medications are **NOT** immunosuppressive.
- **IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO STOP YOUR MEDICINE.** However, if you are ill, you should reschedule your visit until you're feeling well or cleared by your physician.

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Other Frequently Asked Questions

(1) Can COVID-19 be prevented?

→ There are measures that you can take to reduce the chances. Please see Page 2 for instructions. Experts do NOT recommend wearing face masks UNLESS YOU ARE SICK or caring for someone who has (or might have) COVID-19.

(2) How is COVID-19 treated?

→ Unfortunately, there are no currently approved vaccines to prevent COVID-19 infection nor approved treatments for those that are currently infected. Therefore – treatment is really targeted to relieving symptoms and providing the body with the support that it might need to fight any other infection. There are currently a few different treatments which are being tested for use – but none have completed clinical trials at this point.

(3) Do patients known to be infected with COVID-19 need to be hospitalized?

→ As with all infectious diseases, whether a person needs to be hospitalized or not largely depends on their particular symptomatic presentation and disease course. So, put simply, unless a particular patient has (or develops) moderate to severe symptoms – they likely do not need to be hospitalized. However, all patients should follow the guidance of their primary care and/or urgent care physicians with respect to treatment and ongoing care for COVID-19.

(4) Can people who recover from COVID-19 be infected again?

→ The complete immune response to COVID-19 infection is not completely understood as of yet. In similar viruses, patients are less likely to be re-infected shortly after recovery. However, at this point in time, the science is still evolving on this topic.

(5) When is someone infectious?

→ Generally, the incubation time for COVID-19 is between 2-14 days. In patients who had family members who were infected – their symptoms generally appeared within 3-6 days. However, the 14-day time period appears to be the standard at this point in time until we know more about the evolution of this particular virus.

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(6) Which body fluids can spread infection?

→ Generally, as gross as it may sound, any bodily fluid that is wet is likely to spread the infection. This is why hand washing and surface disinfection are VERY IMPORTANT. Droplets of saliva or respiratory excretions can spread 6-9 feet when someone coughs. Covering your mouth and coughing into a tissue is the best way to reduce transmission (followed by washing your hands for a MINIMUM of 20 seconds).

(7) I am currently prescribed an immunosuppressive medication – should I work from home?

→ The accepted standard of care for patients currently prescribed immunosuppressive medications is that any type of self-quarantine or self-isolation is NOT necessary unless there is known contact with a confirmed infectious patient, an individual patient is experiencing symptoms, and/or the local Department of Health recommends such measures to reduce community-wide spread of an infectious disease.

→ That said, patients should keep in mind that due to the evolving nature of the current situation – such recommendations may change quickly and without much notice.

If you have additional questions or concerns, please contact your ARBDA physician to arrange a phone consultation.
