

Zurich, 10 March 2020

Information on the coronavirus (COVID-19 / SARS-CoV-2) for health care professionals

The current situation and affected areas can change continuously. The FOPH (BAG / OFSP) provides information on how to best protect oneself against infection, and on the procedure to be followed in suspected cases.

IBD pharmacotherapy and risk of infections

The risk of certain infections is higher in IBD patients than in the general population. An infection can trigger an IBD relapse, either in people who have not been affected by the disease before or in patients who are in remission (*Nature Clinical Practice Gastroenterology & Hepatology volume 5, pages18-27(2008)*).

An increased susceptibility to infections in IBD can also be due to the suppression of the immune system by medication. The increase of the infection risk depends on the medication, the underlying disease, and co-morbidities, respectively, that can influence the risk. Some drugs increase the risk of infection little or not at all, others are associated with a higher risk. According to a meta-analysis by Wheat and colleagues, caution is advised with combination therapies with steroids (*BMC Gastroenterology (2017) 17:52*).

Patients taking immunosuppressants do not have a higher susceptibility for a COVID-19 infection, however they may be at risk of complications once they are infected.

IBDnet Recommendation for patients treated with immunosuppressive medication

Stopping an ongoing immunosuppressive therapy may trigger an IBD flare, which increase the risk of complications, if infected with COVID-19. According to the current status of knowledge, there is no reason to interrupt an ongoing IBD therapy, as long as there is no suspicion of an active infection with the coronavirus. However, as highlighted by FOPH (BAG / OFSP), special emphasis is advised in elderly patients > 65 years and patients with

- Diseases and therapies that weaken the immune system, both having a higher risk of an unfavorable course of the corona infection
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular diseases

- Chronic respiratory diseases
- Cancer

<https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/de/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov.html#751402655>.

Protection of infection

Please advise your patients to consequently follow the following hygienic measures according to www.bag-coronavirus.ch:

- Cough and sneeze in a handkerchief or crook of your arm
- Dispose paper tissue after use in closed waste bin
- Avoid shaking hands
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap; disinfectant is not mandatory
- Wearing a mouthguard is currently not necessary
- Stay home with fever and cough
- If infection is suspected, call your doctor or emergency ward and follow the given instructions
- BAG telephone hotline for patients: +41 58 463 00 00

Suspicion of infection and notification criteria

In case of suspected infection, please strictly follow the procedure specified by the FOPH. Notification criteria, sampling procedure and reporting forms can be found here:

- Notification criteria: <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/de/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/information-fuer-die-aerzteschaft.html>
- Reporting form: <https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/de/home/krankheiten/infektionskrankheiten-bekaempfen/meldesysteme-infektionskrankheiten/meldepflichtige-ik/meldeformulare.html>
- BAG telephone hotline for HCPs: +41 58 462 21 00