

COVID-19 (coronavirus)



This strain of coronavirus is a new one and scientists do not yet know all there is to know about it, so while these common-sense advice points will always be helpful, it is important that you keep up to date with the advice being given by your local government and how it might affect you personally. These suggestions have been produced using the most up to date advice available and are not intended to replace or supersede advice you may have been given from your health care advisor, your local healthcare, or government.

Q Does lymphedema put me more at risk for COVID-19?

Medical experts contacted by the Lymphoedema Support Network (LSN) advise that in nearly all cases lymphedema alone does not make one more susceptible to the coronavirus. The only exception would be those very rare primary lymphedema patients who have extensive lymphatic abnormalities involving the chest (i.e. lungs), and have generalized immune deficiency.

Q Are there any extra precautions I need to take?

Those with lymphedema should take the same precautions as others although this may be more of a challenge if you wear a compression glove as part of your treatment. Everyone should:

- Follow the latest government guidance, which can be found, on the links below, or by listening to televised/radio reports.
- Wash your hands frequently during the day with soap and water for at least 60 seconds.
- Use hand sanitizer gel with at least 60% alcohol content if hand-washing facilities are not available.
- Keep your hands well moisturized as frequent washing can make the skin dry and cracked (which may lead to cellulitis).
- If you use shared equipment such as keyboards, telephones etc. wipe them with antibacterial wipes between users.
- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve at your elbow if you cough or

sneeze; then disposing of the used tissue immediately and washing your hands.

- Get into the habit of not touching your face, mouth, or eyes.
- Practice social distancing guidance as laid out by your country government (links below).

Q What can I do to keep my compression sleeve or glove clean?

- The LSN has spoken to most of the compression garment manufacturers who advise following the washing instructions on your garment but making sure that you wash your garments each day.
- We are told that antibacterial hand gel will not damage garments if it is on the skin.
- Most garments can be washed in your washing machine at 40° C (104F) on a gentle wash and then dried on the gentle cycle of your dryer. If your garment cannot be tumble-dried then air-dry it thoroughly before use.
- Most garments will stay in peak condition for over 100 washes but putting them in a net washing bag can protect them further.

Q How can I protect my compression garments outside the home?

- You may choose to buy disposable plastic gloves to wear over your compression glove or hand piece while you are outside the home. When you arrive at your destination remove the disposable glove by rolling it off your hand so it ends up inside out and throw it away. Then wash your other hand before removing your compression (this will stop your other hand contaminating the compression glove), wash your hands again and reapply your compression.
- You may choose to wear a disposable glove over your compression glove for longer periods of the day if you are in a job that requires you to wash your hands frequently. Please remember the glove is there to stop your compression glove becoming contaminated, it will not protect you from the virus. The virus can live on the plastic glove and be transferred in the same way as it can on your hand so the same rules apply – wash your

- hands frequently and change the glove often.
- Some people may find it a challenge to find a disposable glove to fit over their swollen hand. You may need to experiment with sizes and if you are unable to find one then talk to your lymphedema health professional to see if they feel it would be appropriate for you to modify when you wear your glove, temporarily.
- When not in your own home avoid using the part of your hand covered by your garment, if possible, and use hand sanitizer gel on your fingers as needed.
- Carry a spare compression glove/garment with you in a sealed plastic bag to use if you are worried your compression glove may have been contaminated. Put the dirty one in the plastic bag and seal it up until it can be washed, remembering to throw the plastic bag away.

Q Where can I get more information?

If you think you may have the virus please refrain from interacting with others and follow the current up to date advice given by your country government to seeking help.

- Canada: canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html
- United States: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html
- United Kingdom: gov.uk/coronavirus
- Australia: health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert

This article was adapted with permission from the Lymphoedema Support Network in the United Kingdom to be relevant to our readers in various countries. We encourage you to view their unabridged document at www.lymphoedema.org or under references at www.lymphedemapathways.ca

