



Pharmacy Department

NHS Steroid Emergency Card

for regular long-term oral steroid treatment

**Information for patients,
relatives, and carers**

Why have I been given this card?

You have been given the NHS Steroid Emergency Card because you may be taking long-term corticosteroid treatment called

.....

Corticosteroids are effective medicines used in the treatment of many conditions and work by reducing inflammation. Steroids also help our body cope with stress.

The adrenal glands in the body naturally make steroid hormones every day. Our bodies make more steroid hormones when we are ill.

Sometimes if people are taking steroids as medicines, the body stops making enough of its own steroid because it senses that steroids are already in the body. This means that someone on steroids may not make enough extra steroid of their own if they have another serious illness, need surgery or to fight off infection.

In the worst cases, people can become seriously ill with what is called an 'adrenal crisis'. This can be life-threatening if not treated.

What are the symptoms of an adrenal crisis?

Signs and symptoms can include feeling very unwell, low blood pressure, dizziness, vomiting and/or diarrhoea, confusion, tiredness, aching muscles/joints, fever, shivering and/or feeling very cold, or headache.

How can I prevent an adrenal crisis?

- ✓ **Remember to take your treatment.** You may also need to take extra steroids if you are unwell. Doctors often call this plan 'sick day rules'.
- ✓ **Make sure you have enough** steroids at home to take when you are unwell.
- ✓ Try to **remember to take your tablets every day.** Regularly missing doses can make you feel unwell.
- ✓ **If you forget a dose,** take it as soon as you remember. If it is almost time for your next dose, skip the one you missed.
- ✓ **Remember,** one dose missed is unlikely to cause a problem, but missing two doses could result in needing to be admitted to hospital.
- ✓ **Avoid** taking steroid medicines late at night (the last daily dose should be taken no later than 6pm or at least four hours before going to sleep) because otherwise you may experience sleeping difficulties.
- ✓ **Do not** suddenly stop taking your steroid treatment, as you may feel very unwell if this happens. You could have weakness, dizziness, tiredness, feeling or being sick, poor appetite, weight loss and stomach pain.
- ✓ If you need an operation, please tell your surgeon and anaesthetist that you are on steroids.
- ✓ If you become unwell, have a fever, are involved in an accident, or require surgery, **you may need a higher dose of your steroids.** Please see the 'sick day rules' section below for further information.
- ✓ **In case of an emergency, if you are seriously unwell or have diarrhoea and/or vomiting and cannot take any tablets, you will need to follow the sick day rule advice in this booklet.**

What do I need to do next?

- ✓ Write your details on the front of the card.
- ✓ Always carry the card with you for 12 months after stopping corticosteroid treatment.
- ✓ Keep the card safe in your purse or wallet.
- ✓ Have it ready to show any healthcare professional you see.
- ✓ Tell your family that you carry an NHS Steroid Emergency Card and what it is for.
- ✓ Ask them to remind you to show your card at every opportunity when receiving treatment. This is very important if you need emergency treatment, as they will be able to tell the emergency services for you.

Do I still need to keep my old blue steroid treatment card too?

Yes, you will need to keep both. However, this new NHS Steroid Emergency Card is very important.

Please also still wear your medic alert bracelet or necklace and keep any other emergency cards you may have.

Sick day rules 1: when you need to take more steroids

If you have symptoms of an adrenal crisis:

1. If you are under the care of an endocrine specialist, considered to be at especially high risk and have been given a hydrocortisone injection, use it now. Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration and follow the instructions in step 2 below.
2. You will need to be admitted to hospital urgently to stabilise your condition. **Dial 999 immediately** for an ambulance, telling the operator that you have an adrenal crisis.

If you have an infection (urinary, chest, tonsillitis and so on) or signs of an infection (temperature higher than 38°C):

1. Take double your usual dose of hydrocortisone until you have recovered from the infection.
2. Contact your GP for advice if you are no better after 48 hours.

Please note if you are on prednisolone, please follow the advice in 'Sick day rules 3: steroid adjustment'.

If you have been prescribed antibiotics for an infection:

1. Take double your usual dose of steroids while you are taking antibiotics (usually three to seven days). If you are on prednisolone, please follow the advice in 'Sick day rules 3: steroid adjustment'.
2. Alternatively, continue to take double dose until you feel completely back to normal.

If you are vomiting with/without diarrhoea:

1. Take double your usual dose of steroid after the first time you vomit (are sick). Continue taking double doses for the next three to five days. If you are on prednisolone, please follow the advice in 'Sick day rules 3: steroid adjustment'.
2. If you vomit within 15 to 30 minutes of taking your medication, inject it instead and continue taking double doses for the next three to five days.

If you have a significant accident or injury, or a fall:

1. Take double your usual dose of steroid, returning to your normal dose only if you feel better within two days. If you are on prednisolone, please follow the advice in 'Sick day rules 3: steroid adjustment'.
2. If you feel no better after two days, keep your steroid dose doubled and seek advice from your GP or your endocrine nurse or doctor.
3. If you have a significant injury, such as a broken bone, you may need urgent care for your injury and to prevent an adrenal crisis. Tell the medical team at the hospital that you are taking long-term steroids.

Sick day rules 2: medical, surgical, and dental procedures

For dental treatments with anaesthetic (such as tooth removal, root canal work, or fillings):

1. Take double your usual dose of steroid for 24 to 48 hours, starting on the day of your appointment.
2. Tell your dentist/dental surgeon that you are on steroids before they start your procedure.

For surgical and invasive procedures (including keyhole surgery and Caesarean sections):

1. Tell your surgeon and anaesthetist that you take regular steroids before the operation.
2. The surgical team will manage your steroid treatment during and immediately after your operation.
3. They may need to switch your steroid treatment to an injection until you can take double your usual steroid dose by mouth.
4. You may then need to continue on double your usual dose for a further two days or for up to a week if you have had major surgery.
5. The surgical team will provide you with further advice if needed.

For investigations such as colonoscopy or barium enemas:

1. When you receive your appointment, please inform the department responsible for your care that you take regular steroids.
2. Drink plenty of fluids while you are taking bowel prep before the procedure and take double your usual dose of steroid including on the day of your appointment.
3. The medical team will manage your steroid levels if necessary before the start of your procedure.

For minor investigations not requiring general anaesthetic, such as gastroscopy or cystoscopy:

1. Tell the doctor before your procedure that you take regular steroids.

2. Take double your usual dose of steroid 24 hours before your appointment, then return to your usual dose.
3. The medical team will decide whether you need to have a steroid injection at the start of your procedure.

Sick day rules 3: steroid adjustment (prednisolone)

If you usually take less than 5mg per day:

1. If you are unwell with a fever, increase your dose to 10mg per day until you have recovered.
2. If you have suspected or confirmed COVID-19, increase your dose to 10mg until you have recovered.

If you usually take 5mg to 15mg per day:

1. If you are unwell with a fever, take 15mg per day until you have recovered.
2. If you have suspected or confirmed COVID-19, take 15mg per day until you have recovered.

If you usually take more than 15mg per day:

1. If you are unwell with a fever, continue to take your usual dose.
2. If you have suspected or confirmed COVID-19, continue to take your usual dose.

If you are at risk of adrenal insufficiency due to long term and/or high dose steroid use

- ✓ Carry a steroid emergency card
www.endocrinology.org/media/3873/steroid-card.pdf
- ✓ Make sure you have a supply of oral prednisolone or hydrocortisone in case you need to take extra. See sick day rules section in this booklet.

- ✓ We recommend that you have a one-month reserve of steroid medication, such as two boxes containing 28 hydrocortisone 10mg tablets.
- ✓ If you have been asked to fast (have nothing to eat for several hours, such as before a medical procedure) and are taking a once-a-day steroid preparation, take this as usual in the morning. If you are required to fast longer or regularly (such as during Ramadan), please discuss with your pharmacist, GP, or specialist. If you are on a steroid preparation which you are required to take several times a day, contact your endocrinology specialist. They will do a careful review of the risk and if they think it is safe for you to fast, they will create an individual plan for you. They may need to change your hydrocortisone to a long-acting formulation to be taken once a day.

Further information

Addison's Disease Self-Help Group

www.addisonsdisease.org.uk/

Pituitary Foundation

www.pituitary.org.uk/

Society for Endocrinology

www.endocrinology.org/clinical-practice/patient-information/

www.endocrinology.org/clinical-practice/covid-19-resources-for-managing-endocrine-conditions/

I have lost my new card, where can I get another one from?

You can get a new or replacement NHS Steroid Emergency Card from your GP practice, community pharmacy or hospital.

You can have more than one card if you would like to store them in different places. Please make sure the details on both cards are the same.

You can also screenshot your NHS Steroid Emergency Card and save it as a photo or have it as a screensaver on your mobile phone.

Further advice on how to do this can be found at www.addisonsdisease.org.uk/news/new-nhs-steroid-card-released

If you have any queries or concerns about your new NHS Steroid Emergency Card, please speak to your community pharmacist.

Pharmacy Team

October 2021

Review October 2023

MED/ 268/ 2021

© Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

This booklet is available in other formats, including large print and Easy Read, from the customer care team (telephone [01256 486766](tel:01256486766) or email customer care@hhft.nhs.uk)