



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Learning from the pandemic: Avoiding COPD flare-ups and hospital admissions

Developed by Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

With the Northumbria Lung Research Patient and Public  
Involvement Group, and Northumberland and North Tyneside  
CCGs

## **This document contains important information for patients with COPD about reducing the spread of all respiratory viruses.**

Thank you for everything you have done to protect yourself and others during the Covid-19 pandemic. Simple steps like hand-washing, wearing face coverings and keeping your distance from others limit the spread of Covid -19, but they also reduce the spread of other respiratory viruses that cause COPD flare-ups.

In Northumberland and North Tyneside, since the pandemic started, we have seen a lot fewer exacerbations (flare-ups) of COPD and 43% fewer COPD hospital admissions compared to the previous year. This was not because people were reluctant or afraid to attend hospital, but rather a real fall in COPD flare-ups and admissions. The decrease in flareups was also greater than that seen with inhalers and other COPD treatments.

You should follow government guidance on Covid-19, **but we want you to be physically active and to keep up social contacts - as safely as possible.**

**“Make sure you exercise each day, even when sitting. It’s so important.”**

**COPD patient in their 60s**

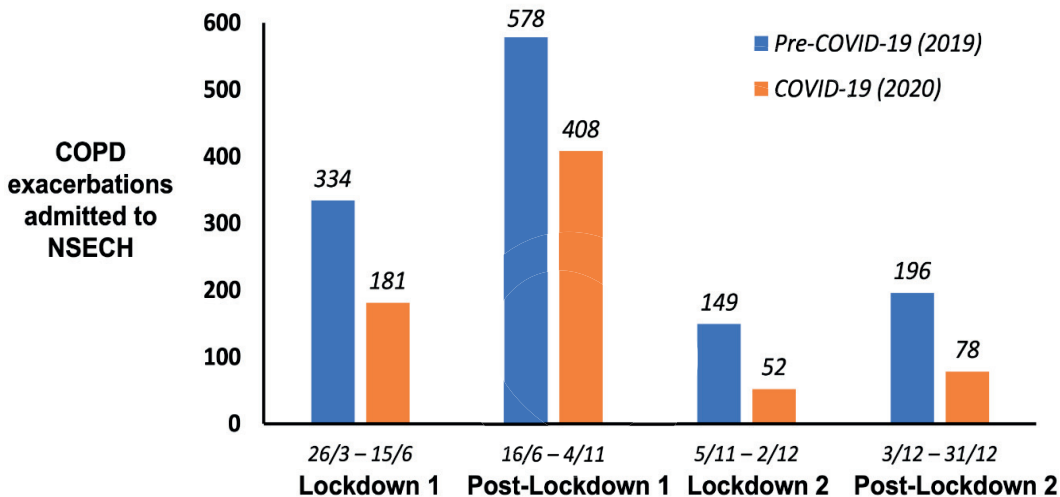
## Actions you can take

Consider taking the following steps to help avoid COPD flare-ups and hospital admissions. This is most important between December and March (peak flu season). **Please also accept all vaccines offered to you - flu, pneumonia and Covid.**

- Avoid contact with people with active respiratory infections, including simple coughs and colds.
- If someone you live with has a respiratory infection, consider keeping to separate rooms and wash your hands often. In shared areas, disinfect surfaces and wear a mask (including the person who is ill).
- More frequent hand-washing, particularly around young children (highest risk of infection).
- Wear a mask on public transport and in indoor spaces (particularly when crowded and poorly ventilated).
- When choosing to socialise, favour well-ventilated, uncrowded spaces, ideally outside.
- Try to maintain distance from others in public spaces and indoors.

## What does the data show?

The graph below shows the change in COPD admissions to the Northumbria Specialist Emergency Care Hospital (NSECH) in Cramlington during lockdown and post-lockdown periods in 2020 compared to similar periods in 2019.



There is still a clear benefit with simple precautions post-lockdown

- There were 43% fewer hospital admissions for COPD flare-ups during the pandemic in 2020 compared to the previous year.
- If the fall in admissions had been because patients were afraid to attend hospital, we would have expected patients arriving in hospital to be more unwell. This was not the case.
- Among patients admitted with a COPD flare-up, there was no increase in need for ventilation (extra breathing support) or deaths (both in hospital and within 30 days of going home).
- This was a true fall in COPD flare-ups and admissions and a similar reduction in hospital admissions for COPD flare-ups has been reported in other countries.

## Additional information

General information about COPD:

<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/copd>

Videos on breathing control and sputum clearance:

<https://tinyurl.com/breathingcontrol>

<https://tinyurl.com/sputumclearance>

Inhaler technique:

<https://RightBreathe.com>



## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

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