

Q&A with Dr Cat



Hi, my name is Dr Catriona McKeating and I'm a Paediatric Consultant at Forget Me Not Children's Hospice. I was trained here in West Yorkshire and have a special interest in both Paediatric Palliative Care and Medical Education. I've been working at Forget Me Not since 2014, but I'm also a General Paediatric Consultant with Bradford Teaching Hospitals.

My role at Forget Me Not is varied - I support the development of children's advance care plans, I help with symptom control and I support at end-of-life. Additionally, I work with teams from across other health care settings to coordinate care.

I know that many of the parents we support at Forget Me Not have a lot of questions right now, so I wanted to answer some of the most common ones in this Q&A. If you have any questions or concerns specific to your own child, don't forget that you can ring the hospice any time on 01484 411 042.



Q: Should I bring my child to hospital if they are unwell?

A: If your child is unwell, it's important that you still seek medical attention just as you normally would. Like many children your child may not be ill because of COVID-19, but they may still require medical assessment or treatment.

If you're unsure whether your child needs medical care, you can call 111 or you can follow your child's usual care plan (if they have one). Alternatively, you could contact their GP or the team at the hospice. If your child is very unwell, you or another person (such as the GP or 111 operator) may decide that they would benefit from urgent hospital care and an ambulance may be called. Ambulance teams have personal protective equipment (PPE), as do hospital staff who will be ready to see your child when they arrive. Even if your child does not have COVID-19 symptoms, the hospital may still need to wear PPE - so please don't be alarmed.

Children's wards and assessment areas in hospitals are being run safely, with measures in place to protect you, your child and the staff there. There has been lots of planning to make sure these environments stay as child friendly as possible. Only staff who are healthy, well and symptom-free are working, and they have appropriate PPE to keep you and your child safe.

You may be asked to do things differently at the moment, such as wear a mask and stay in a particular room. Visiting may be different to normal, but the ward team will let you know how this will work. Packing an overnight bag to take in to hospital can be a good idea if you have time to do it.

Children's assessment areas and wards (and emergency departments) are usually still located in the same place as they were before COVID-19, but it is a good idea to check this before you set off - and ask for directions if you need them.

Q: If a member of my household is shielding, should my child go to hospital?

A: For urgent treatment - yes. If your child is unwell and needs hospital care they should come to hospital. The person bringing your child in to hospital should let the triage nurse/doctor know your circumstances as soon as you arrive. The team should arrange for your child to be seen and leave you to wait in a clean side room (with the door closed) to minimise your risks of exposure to the virus.

For non-urgent treatment - It depends. If your child has a hospital outpatient clinic appointment, check with the team if this can be done remotely (e.g. by telephone or video call). If your child needs to be seen face to face, let the hospital know that a member of your household is shielding and again, you should be seen and remain in a clean side room and spend as short a time as possible at the hospital.

Q: I have heard in the news that there are limited health resources because of COVID-19 (like intensive care beds and equipment) - Will my child be treated differently if they are unwell because they have complex health needs or a life limiting condition?

A: No, your child should not be treated any differently and should receive the usual care which would be expected. At the moment, there are enough paediatric hospital and intensive care beds and supplies to be able to offer usual paediatric and intensive care to children in our region.

Q: Can I / should I change my child's advance care plan now there is a COVID-19 pandemic?

A: Advance care planning documents can be changed at any time. If you wish to start or revise the contents of the plan it can be helpful to do this with health professionals (e.g. your lead doctor or nurse) who know your child best, and at a time when your child is well and there is no current emergency. These discussions do not have to be in person - you could ask for a telephone or video call. We are always happy to help support you and your child with these discussions at the hospice and to listen to any worries or concerns you have - it can be helpful to talk things through.

Q: Everyone is busy helping with the COVID-19 pandemic response. Will my child's doctor, specialist nurse or other health professional be too busy to talk with me?

A: Lots of people in healthcare have been asked to change the way they are working or to move roles. However, in children's medicine and hospice care a member of the team will always be able to provide you and your child support. The likelihood is that your child's specialist nurse or hospital consultant will still be in the same role as before (even if their working pattern has changed). They, or a trusted team member, will be able to arrange a time to talk through any concerns you have if you let them know you would like to do this.

Q: If my child gets COVID-19, will they survive?

A: Everyone responds differently to infections and there remains a lot unknown about COVID-19. However, what doctors and nurses are seeing when treating children in the UK (as has been seen all over the world) is that, in the main, the COVID-19 virus is not causing severe illness in children and babies. We know that children with underlying health issues may be more vulnerable to having a more severe illness to any viral infection (like the flu or colds), and that may be true for the COVID-19 infection. So seeking advice and medical attention early if you think your child has signs or symptoms is sensible. You should follow the government advice on how to seek medical attention. The hospice can help you with this if you need advice and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on **01484 411 042**.

Q: Where can I find out more information about COVID-19 to support me in looking after my child and family?

A: Here's some useful links:

Together for Short Lives – Family resources: Coronavirus Q&A <https://www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk/get-support/supporting-you/family-resources/coronavirus-qa/>

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH): COVID-19 resources for parents and carers <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-resources-parents-carers>

Council for Disabled Children (CDC): COVID-19 Support and Guidance <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/covid-19-support-and-guidance>

COVID-19: guidance for the public on mental health and wellbeing (Public Health England, GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

WellChild - COVID-19 Direct Response Service – <https://www.wellchild.org.uk/coronavirus/direct-response/>