General advice
Do not suddenly stop taking lithium. Make sure you have enough supplies of medicines.
It is important to try and limit your chances of getting Coronavirus and follow the NHS advice:
- Stay at home unless you have an unavoidable reason to leave the house or if you are a key worker
- Wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds. Always wash your hands when you get home or into work
- Use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- Put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- Don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

This document is also available in other languages, large print, Braille, and audio format upon request. Please email communications.cnwl@nhs.net

Contact details:
Your mental health team can be contacted by calling:

Contact Medicines Information Helpline (MIH) for patients and carers:
020 3317 5090 Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Contact Single Point of Access (SPA):
0800 0234 650 (Freephone) Monday to Friday – 5pm to 9am
Weekends/bank holidays – open 24 hours

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Patients without Covid-19 symptoms
During Covid-19 pandemic do not attend the clinic or GP surgery for your routine lithium monitoring tests.
The appointment should be re-booked for a later date unless you fall in the high-risk group. Please check with your doctor to confirm if you are considered at high-risk of either lithium toxicity or coronavirus.

Patients with Covid-19 symptoms
If you have developed an infection you may be at an increased risk of developing lithium toxicity. If you are vomiting, have diarrhoea or an infection (especially if sweating profusely) you may need a smaller dose of lithium. Contact your GP to arrange for an urgent lithium level blood test. Do not attend the clinic or GP surgery for a blood test.

The relationship between kidney function and lithium
The kidneys main function is to filter the blood, excrete waste products and regulate the body’s fluid balance by excreting excess water or conserving it. Lithium is exclusively excreted by the kidneys; therefore its level in the body can be affected by kidney function.

Risk of lithium toxicity during the coronavirus outbreak may be due to:
- The infection causing loss of fluid, sweating profusely, diarrhoea and vomiting, all resulting in dehydration
- Covid-19 infection may cause kidney injury and reduce the kidneys’ ability to clear lithium from the body; lithium levels may build-up potentially leading to lithium toxicity
- The interaction of some medicines with lithium, for example. Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen
- Too much alcohol which could lead to dehydration.

Signs of lithium toxicity include:
- Severe hand shake (tremor)
- Blurred vision
- Stomach ache along with feeling sick and having diarrhoea
- Being unsteady on your feet
- Difficulty in speaking or slurring of words
- Muscle twitches
- Clumsiness
- Feeling unusually sleepy
- Confusion
- Muscle weakness

Signs of dehydration include:
- Feeling thirsty
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Feeling tired
- A dry mouth, lips and eyes
- Dark yellow and strong-smelling pee
- Peeing little, and fewer than four times a day

What does “remain hydrated” or “drink enough” mean in relation to lithium?
To make sure that you maintain a similar daily fluid intake to prevent dehydration. Here are some tips:
- Make sure that you are drinking similar amount of fluid everyday
- Make sure you drink water regularly throughout the day
- Have a cuppa, for example one or two cups of tea or coffee a day (remember too much caffeine may cause dehydration)
- Have food with high water content like, soups, ice cream, jellies, or fruits like melon.

Further information
Choice and Medication: For more information about lithium and other mental health medicines please look at the Choice and Medication website: www.choiceandmedication.org/cnwl

How to take lithium safely
- Continue to take your lithium as usual, and make sure you have enough supplies
- Maintain a steady daily fluid intake to prevent dehydration
- If you lose lots of fluids, for example, due to sweating from an infection, diarrhoea, vomiting, or if you become dehydrated this may lead to lithium toxicity
- You may not experience symptoms of lithium toxicity and/or dehydration straight away, so report symptoms of coronavirus or any other infection to your doctor
- The GP may arrange a lithium level blood test to confirm whether it is the the infection or other factors that have affected your lithium level
- Ongoing treatment and the dosage should be determined by blood levels
- If taking your lithium level is delayed, your doctor may advise you to pause taking it temporary. Please do not make this decision without consulting your doctor first
- Please be aware that suddenly stopping lithium can lead to a rapid relapse of mental health symptoms, particularly mania
- Continue to follow the advice in your Lithium Therapy Booklet.