



Intranasal corticosteroids in allergic rhinitis in COVID-19 infected patients: An ARIA-EAACI statement

Jean Bousquet^{1,2,3,4} | Cezmi A. Akdis⁵ | Marek Jutel^{6,7} | Claus Bachert^{8,9,10,11} |
Ludger Klimek¹² | Ioana Agache¹³ | Ignacio J. Ansotegui¹⁴ | Anna Bedbrook⁴ |
Sinthia Bosnic-Anticevich^{15,16} | G. Walter Canonica^{17,18} | Tomas Chivato¹⁹ |
Alvaro A. Cruz^{20,21} | Wienczyslawa Czarlewski²² | Stefano Del Giacco²³ | Hui Du²⁴ |
Joao A. Fonseca^{25,26,27,28} | Yadong Gao²⁹ | Tari Haahtela³⁰ |
Karin Hoffmann-Sommergruber³¹ | Juan-Carlos Ivancevich³² | Nikolaï Khaltaev³³ |
Edward F. Knol³⁴ | Piotr Kuna³⁵ | Desiree Larenas-Linnemann³⁶ | Joaquim Mullol^{37,38} |
Robert Naclerio³⁹ | Ken Ohta⁴⁰ | Yoshitaka Okamoto⁴¹ | Liam O'Mahony⁴² |
Gabrielle L. Onorato⁴ | Nikos G. Papadopoulos^{43,44} | Oliver Pfaar⁴⁵ |
Boleslaw Samolinski⁴⁶ | Jürgen Schwarze⁴⁷ | Sanna Toppila-Salmi³⁰ |
Maria-Teresa Ventura⁴⁸ | Arunas Valiulis^{49,50} | Arzu Yorgancioglu⁵¹ |
Torsten Zuberbier^{52,53} | Ruby Pawankar⁵⁴ | the ARIA-MASK Study Group*

¹Charité, Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

²Berlin Institute of Health, Comprehensive Allergy Center, Department of Dermatology and Allergy, Berlin, Germany

³University Hospital Montpellier, Montpellier, France

⁴MACVIA-France, Montpellier, France

⁵Swiss Institute of Allergy and Asthma Research (SIAF), University of Zurich, Davos, Switzerland

⁶Department of Clinical Immunology, Wrocław Medical University, Wrocław, Poland

⁷ALL-MED Medical Research Institute, Wrocław, Poland

⁸Upper Airways Research Laboratory, ENT Dept, Ghent University Hospital, Ghent, Belgium

⁹Sun Yat-sen University, International Airway Research Center, Ghent University Hospital, First Affiliated Hospital, Guangzhou, China

¹⁰Division of ENT Diseases, CLINTEC, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

¹¹Department of ENT Diseases, Karolinska University Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden

¹²Center for Rhinology and Allergology, Wiesbaden, Germany

¹³Transylvania University Brasov, Brasov, Romania

¹⁴Department of Allergy and Immunology, Hospital Quirónsalud Bizkaia, Erandio, Spain

¹⁵Woolcock Institute of Medical Research, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia

¹⁶Woolcock Emphysema Centre and Sydney Local Health District, Glebe, NSW, Australia

¹⁷Personalized Medicine, Asthma and Allergy - Humanitas Clinical and Research Center - IRCCS, Rozzano, Milan, Italy

¹⁸Department of Biomedical Sciences - Humanitas University -, Pieve Emanuele, Milan, Italy

¹⁹School of Medicine, University CEU San Pablo, Madrid, Spain

Bousquet, Akdis and Jutel participated equally to the paper.

Bousquet, Bachert, Bedbrook, Bosnic-Anticevich, Canonica, Cruz, Czarlewski, Fonseca, Haahtela, Ivancevich, Kuna, Larenas-Linnemann, Mullol, Naclerio, Ohta, Okamoto, Papadopoulos, Pawankar, Pfaar, Samolinski, Toppila-Salmi, Valiulis, Yorgancioglu and Zuberbier are members of the ARIA and MASK boards.

Jutel, Klimek, Agache, Chivato, Sommergruber, Knol, O'Mahony and Schwarze are members of the EAACI board of officers.

*The ARIA-MASK Study Group members are shown in Appendix 1.

- ²⁰ProAR – Nucleo de Excelencia em Asma, Federal University of Bahia, Salvador, Brazil
- ²¹WHO GARD Planning Group, Montpellier, Brazil
- ²²Medical Consulting Czarlewski, Levallois, and MASK-air, Montpellier, France
- ²³Department of Medical Sciences and Public Health and Unit of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, University Hospital "Dulio Casula", University of Cagliari, Cagliari, Italy
- ²⁴Department of Respiratory Medicine, Wuhan Children's Hospital, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong, University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, Hubei, China
- ²⁵Center for Research in Health Technologies and Information Systems- CINTESIS, Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal
- ²⁶Allergy Unit, Instituto CUF Porto e Hospital CUF Porto, Porto, Portugal
- ²⁷Health Information and Decision Sciences Department - CIDES, Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal
- ²⁸Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal
- ²⁹Department of Allergology, Zhongnan Hospital of Wuhan University, Wuhan, Hubei, China
- ³⁰Skin and Allergy Hospital, Helsinki University Hospital, Helsinki, Finland
- ³¹Department of Pathophysiology and Allergy Research, Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
- ³²Servicio de Alergia e Inmunología, Clínica Santa Isabel, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- ³³GARD Chairman, Geneva, Switzerland
- ³⁴Departments of Immunology and Dermatology/Allergology, University Medical Center Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands
- ³⁵Division of Internal Medicine, Asthma and Allergy, Barlicki University Hospital, Medical University of Lodz, Lodz, Poland
- ³⁶Center of Excellence in Asthma and Allergy, Médica Sur Clinical Foundation and Hospital, México City, Mexico
- ³⁷Rhinology Unit & Smell Clinic, ENT Department, Hospital Clínic, Barcelona, Spain
- ³⁸Clinical & Experimental Respiratory Immunoallergy, IDIBAPS, CIBERES, University of Barcelona, Spain
- ³⁹Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD, USA
- ⁴⁰National Hospital Organization, Tokyo National Hospital, Tokyo, Japan
- ⁴¹Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Chiba University Hospital, Chiba, Japan
- ⁴²Departments of Medicine and Microbiology, APC Microbiome Ireland, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland
- ⁴³Division of Infection, Immunity & Respiratory Medicine, Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
- ⁴⁴Allergy Dpt, 2nd Pediatric Clinic, University of Athens, Athens, Greece
- ⁴⁵Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Section of Rhinology and Allergy, University Hospital Marburg, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany
- ⁴⁶Department of Prevention of Environmental Hazards and Allergology, Medical University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
- ⁴⁷Centre for Inflammation Research, Child Life and Health, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
- ⁴⁸Unit of Geriatric Immunoallergology, University of Bari Medical School, Bari, Italy
- ⁴⁹Vilnius University Faculty of Medicine, Institute of Clinical Medicine & Institute of Health Sciences, Vilnius, Lithuania
- ⁵⁰European Academy of Paediatrics (EAP/UEMS-SP), Brussels, Belgium
- ⁵¹Celal Bayar University Department of Pulmonology, Manisa, Turkey
- ⁵²Charité - Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Corporate Member of Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany
- ⁵³Berlin Institute of Health, Comprehensive Allergy-Centre, Department of Dermatology and Allergy, Member of GA²LEN, Berlin, Germany
- ⁵⁴Department of Pediatrics, Nippon Medical School, Tokyo, Japan

Correspondence: Jean Bousquet, CHU Arnaud de Villeneuve, 371 Avenue du Doyen Gaston Giraud, 34295 Montpellier Cedex 5, France.
 Email: jean.bousquet@orange.fr

A novel strain of human coronaviruses, named by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV)¹ as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has emerged and caused an infectious disease. This disease has recently been referred to by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as the "coronavirus disease 2019" (COVID-19). Since the first report of this disease in December 2019 in Wuhan, China,^{2,3} COVID-19 has aggressively spread across the globe. WHO declared it a pandemic on March 11.

COVID-19 presents with many different clinical manifestations, ranging from asymptomatic cases to mild and severe disease, with or without pneumonia.⁴ Patients with common allergic conditions do not develop additional distinct symptoms and do not seem to be at an increased risk of severe disease. Allergic children show a

mild course, like other children.⁵ COVID-19 cases with pre-existing COPD, or complicated by secondary bacterial pneumonia, are more severe, and this may be due to a complex immune pathogenesis.

Whether systemic corticosteroids have a deleterious effect on COVID-19 infection is still a matter of discussion. Clinical evidence does not support corticosteroid treatment for SARS-CoV-2 pneumonia.⁶ Moreover, corticosteroid therapy in patients with MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) was not associated with a difference in mortality after adjustment for time-varying confounders but was associated with delayed MERS coronavirus RNA clearance.⁷ In accordance with current WHO guidance,⁸ it has been proposed that corticosteroids should not be used for SARS-CoV-2-induced lung injury or shock, except in the setting of a clinical trial. However,

a team of front-line physicians from China had a different perspective.⁹ Given the inconclusive evidence and urgent clinical demand, physicians from the Chinese Thoracic Society have developed an expert consensus statement on the use of corticosteroids in SARS-CoV-2 pneumonia that may allow the restricted use of low doses of corticosteroids for a short duration.¹⁰

Concerning inhaled corticosteroids in asthma, the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) recently stated the following (<https://ginasthma.org/recommendations-for-inhaled-asthma-controller-medications/>): "Some sources have suggested that "corticosteroids" should be avoided during the for SARS-CoV-2 epidemic. This advice is about the use of oral corticosteroids unless there is a clear indication for their use. However, patients with asthma should not stop their prescribed inhaled corticosteroid controller medication (or prescribed oral corticosteroids). Stopping inhaled corticosteroids often leads to potentially dangerous worsening of asthma, and avoiding oral corticosteroids during severe asthma attacks may have serious consequences. Long-term oral corticosteroids may sometimes be required to treat severe asthma, and it may be dangerous to stop them suddenly. Always discuss with your doctor or nurse before stopping

any asthma medication. Keep taking your inhaled asthma controller medication, and if your asthma gets worse, follow the instructions on your asthma action plan for how to change your asthma medications and when to seek medical help."

Some scientific societies have made recommendations for anosmia and have proposed the use of intranasal corticosteroids. However, the French Agency (Direction Générale de la Santé) has contraindicated their use in anosmia and ageusia without nasal obstruction.¹¹ They have extended the contraindication to saline washing since this could promote viral dissemination.

ARIA and EAACI followed the example of the Dutch ENT Society and sent a questionnaire to all ARIA members regarding the recommendations for allergic rhinitis and anosmia. ARIA and EAACI are proposing a joint statement following the results of the questionnaire.

1 | Anecdotal evidence

In the Wuhan Children's hospital, there were about 40 paediatric COVID-19 cases with AR. Among these cases, approximately one

TABLE 1 Results of the questionnaire

		Agree	Somewhat disagree	Completely disagree	No answer
1	Currently, nasal corticosteroid spray can be continued in the hay fever season.	175 (91.6%)	4 (2.2%)	3 (1.5%)	9 (4.7%)
2	Stopping local nasal corticoid spray is not advised: suppression of the immune system has not been proven, and more sneezing after stopping means more spreading of the Coronavirus.	173 (90.6%)	4 (2.2%)	3 (1.5%)	11 (5.8%)
3	Prescribing local nasal spray against anosmia due to Corona infection does not make sense.	100 (51.6%)	3 (1.5%)	0	88 (47.5%)

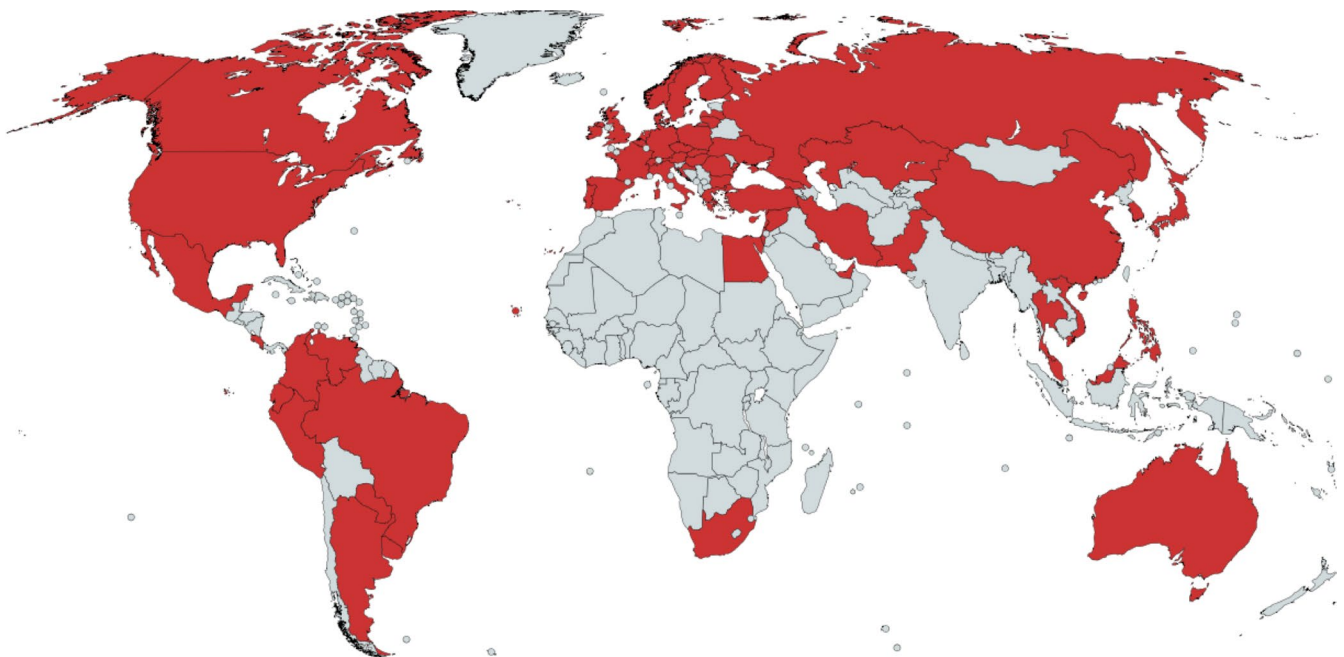


FIGURE 1 List of countries with at least one answer to the questionnaire [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

third used intranasal steroids regularly as before, the other two thirds did not. It was observed in these two patient groups that there was no difference in the severity and prognosis of COVID-19 and that all of them recovered well. (Personal communication Yadong Gao and Hui Du, Unpublished data).

2 | Questionnaire

A Delphi process was initiated by Anna Bedbrook who sent the three questions proposed by the Dutch ENT Society to the entire ARIA database (509 members, 84 countries), asking members to agree, somewhat disagree or completely disagree. After 48 hours, 209 replies were received from 61 countries (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Q3 led to too many unanswered comments and could not be considered. Moreover, the scientific basis for this recommendation is lacking.

3 | Recommendations

With the current knowledge, in patients with COVID-19 infection, intranasal corticosteroids (including spray) can be continued in allergic rhinitis at the recommended dose.

Stopping local intranasal corticosteroids is not advised. Suppression of the immune system has not been proven and more sneezing after stopping means more spreading of the Coronavirus.

These recommendations are conditional since there is a paucity of data and they should be revised regularly with new knowledge.

ORCID

Cezmi A. Akdis  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8020-019X>

Claus Bachert  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4742-1665>

Ioana Agache  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7994-364X>

Alvaro A. Cruz  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7403-3871>

Tari Haahtela  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4757-2156>

Ken Ohta  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9734-4579>

Liam O'Mahony  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4705-3583>

Nikos G. Papadopoulos  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4448-3468>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4448-3468>

Oliver Pfaar  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4374-9639>

Torsten Zuberbier  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1466-8875>

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APPENDIX 1

ARIA- MASK study group

Amir H Abdul Latiff, Mübeccel Akdis, Mona Al-Ahmad, Emilio Alvarez Cuesta, Hasan Arshad, Maria Cristina Artesani, Zeinab Awad, Mostafa Badr Eldin, Sergio Barba, Cristina Barbara, Eric D Bateman, Bianca Beghe, Elisabeth Bel, Karl-Christian Bergmann, Elena Camelia Berghea, David Bernstein, Leif Bjermer, Attilio Boner, Sergio Bonini, Isabelle Bosse, Jacques Bouchard, Louis-Philippe Boulet, Fulvio Braido, Christopher Brightling, Roland Buhl, Carmen Bunu, Andrew Bush, William W Busse, Fernando Caballero-Fonseca, Davide Caimmi, Silvia Caimmi, Paulo Camargos, Vicky Cardona, Kai-Hakon Carlsen, Warner Carr, Pedro Carreiro-Martins, Thomas Casale, Lorenzo Cecchi, Niels H Chavannes, Alfonso Cepeda, Ekaterine Chkhartishvili, George Christoff, Derek K Chu, Cemal Cingi, Giorgio Ciprandi, Ieva Cirule, Jaime Correia de Sousa, Maria del Carmen Costa Dominguez, André Coste, Linda Cox, Adnan Custovic, Ulf Darsow, Frédéric de Blay, Diana Deleanu, Pascal Demoly, Philippe Devillier, Alain Didier, Ratko Djukanovic, Maria Do Ceu Teixeira, Dejan Dokic, Ruta Dubakiene, Stephen Durham, Patrik Eklund, Yehia El-Gamal, Regina Emuzyte, Julia Esser-von-Bieren, Alessandro Fiocchi, Wytske J Fokkens, Mina Gaga, José Luis Gálvez Romero, Bilun Gemicioglu, Sonya Genova, José Gereda, Maximiliano Gomez, Maia Gotua, Ineta Grisle, Marta Guidacci, Maria Antonieta Guzmán, Adnan Hejjaoui, Elham Hossny, Jonathan O Hourihane, Martin Hrubisko, Yunuen Huerta Villalobos, Guido Iaccarino, Carla Irani, Zhanat Ispayeva, Edgardo Jares, Ewa Jassem, Erika Jensen-Jarolim, Sebastian Johnston, Guy Joos, Ki-Suck Jung, Jocelyne Just, Igor Kaidashev, Omer Kalayci, Fuat Kalyoncu, Przemyslaw Kardas, Jussi Karjalainen, Jorg Kleine-Tebbe, Gerard Koppelman, Marek L Kowalski, Mikael Kuitunen, Violeta Kvedariene, Susanne Lau, Lan

Le, Marcus Lessa, Michael Levin, Jing Li, Philip Lieberman, Brian Lipworth, Karin C Lodrup Carlsen, Bassam Mahboub, Mika Makela, Hans-Jorgen Malling, Gailen Marshall, Pedro Carreiro-Martins, Mohammad Masjedi, Juan José Matta, Cem Meço, Erik Melén, Eli O Meltzer, Hans Merk, Jean-Pierre Michel, Florin Mihaltan, Neven Miculinic, Branislava Milenkovic, Yousser Mohammad, Mathieu Molimard, Mario Morais-Almeida, Ralph Mösges, Lars Münter, Antonella Muraro, Tihomir Mustakov, Alla Nakonechna, Leyla Namazova-Baranova, Kristof Nekam, Laurent Nicod, Robyn O'Hehir, Kimihiro Okubo, Brian Oliver, Pier Luigi Paggiaro, Isabella Pali-Schöll, Petr Panzner, Hae-Sim Park, Ana Pereira, Bernard Pigearias, Constantinos Pitsios, Davor Plavec, Wolfgang Pohl, Todor Popov, Fabienne Portejoie, Paul Potter, Lars Poulsen, Emmanuel Prokopakis, Klaus Rabe, Marysia Recto, Janet Rimmer, Jose Angelo Rizzo, Graham

Roberts, Nicolas Roche, Antonino Romano, Jose Rosado-Pinto, Nelson Rosario, Lanny Rosenwasser, Philip Rouadi, Dermot Ryan, Mario Sanchez-Borges, Joaquin Sastre-Dominguez, Glenis Scadding, Elie Serrano, Nikolaos Siafakas, Estelle F Simons, Juan-Carlos Sisul, Dirceu Solé, Talant Sooronbaev, Manuel Soto-Martinez, Manuel Soto-Quiros, Cristiana Stellato, Rafael Stelmach, Timo Strandberg, Charlotte Suppli Ulrik, Carel Thijs, Peter-Valentin Tomazic, Massimo Triggiani, Ioanna Tsiligianni, Marilyn Urrutia Pereira, Marylin Valentin Rostan, Erkka Valovirta, Eric Van Ganse, Marianne van Hage, Olivier Vandenplas, Petra Vidgren, Martin Wagenmann, Dana Wallace, De Yun Wang, Susan Wasserman, Magnus Wickman, Dennis Williams, Barbara Yawn, Osman B Yusuf, Mario Zernotti, Mihaela Zidarn.