Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Considerations for people with cancer

What are coronavirus and COVID-19?
Coronavirus is a type of virus that can infect your nose, upper throat, and respiratory system.* There are many strains of coronavirus. Some coronaviruses can cause mild illnesses, such as the common cold but others can develop into more severe diseases that may impact the respiratory system or other organs within the body. In December 2019, a new coronavirus that causes more severe illness, COVID-19 (which stands for “coronavirus disease 2019”), was identified in China. COVID-19 has become a global pandemic. In most cases, COVID-19 causes symptoms similar to flu. However, the virus can cause severe, life-threatening symptoms that require immediate medical attention.

![Coronavirus illustration from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus)


Symptoms**
- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- If you have symptoms:
  - Call your doctor before going in, if you think you have COVID-19. The doctor's office can prepare to see you without exposing other patients, by providing a mask and using a separate room
  - **Seek medical attention immediately** if you experience more severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, confusion, or tightness in chest

Special precautions for people with cancer
People with cancer and those undergoing active cancer treatment, as well as elderly patients, and people with other serious chronic medical conditions, such as lung disease, diabetes, or heart disease, may be at higher risk to contract the more severe form of COVID-19.

People in these at risk groups should:
- Avoid any non-essential travel
- Have enough essential medications, both prescription and over-the-counter, to last at least 1 month
- Create an emergency contact list
- Connect with your family and friends virtually
- If you have scheduled cancer treatments during the COVID-19 outbreak, have a discussion with your oncologist about the benefits and risks of continuing or delaying treatment
- Have a living will or medical directive in place in case you become too sick to make medical decisions for yourself

![Respiratory bronchiole](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html)

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*https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus.


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Transmitting Coronavirus.
- Coronavirus spreads from person to person through little droplets that spray out from the nose or mouth when an infected person coughs, sneezes, laughs, or even talks. It is believed these small droplets can travel up to 13 feet.
- Although research is still emerging on COVID-19, the primary belief is that it spreads through contact with respiratory drops that are spread through the air or have landed on surfaces.
- When another person breathes in these drops or touches a surface that the drops have landed on and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth, the virus can enter the body.
- After infection, symptoms can typically appear within 2 to 6 days but may take up to 2 weeks.

Expected changes with my cancer-related medical visits
- The increased risk of exposure and transmission of the COVID-19 virus by going out in public has changed the way most hospitals and clinics are handling visitation policies. Some may allow 1 visitor per patient but others may allow no visitors. Before heading to your next medical appointment, check with your clinic or hospital for their current visitor policy.
- Your cancer care team may prefer to change some of your appointments to telemedicine. During a telemedicine appointment, you stay at home and speak with your health care provider either through telephone or video conference if you are able.

Will I be able to continue my cancer treatments if I have had COVID-19?
- If you have tested positive for COVID-19, it is recommended you have a discussion with your oncologist about how this may impact your cancer treatment plan.

Where can I find the latest information on COVID-19?
- It is important to stay up-to-date on the latest information regarding the COVID-19 outbreak. The CDC and your local and state health departments have ongoing information about the disease and important developments for your community.

Prevention
- Wear a mask
- Don’t touch face with unwashed hands
- Wash your hands
- Practice social distancing
- Stay at home
- Keep objects clean
- Cover your mouth with elbow
- Avoid contact with other people