



INFORMATION AND ADVICE FOR ADELAIDE ONCOLOGY & HAEMATOLOGY CANCER PATIENTS ABOUT COVID-19

(THESE ARE THE GUIDELINES THAT WERE DEVELOPED AND SHARED BY THE ROYAL ADELAIDE HOSPITAL CANCER CENTRE)

Do We Know How COVID-19 Affects Cancer Patients?

We are still learning how this virus may affect those who have cancer. So far, evidence from China suggests that smokers and patients with cancer have a high risk of complications. This risk is higher in patients with more than one chronic medical condition.

Are All Cancer Patients At Risk, Or Only Those Currently Undergoing Treatment?

Patients who are undergoing active treatment for cancer are presumed to be at higher risk than those whose cancer is in remission. Patients undergoing chemotherapy could be at higher risk for complications if they get infected with COVID-19. Those who had chemotherapy 3 or more months ago may still have a weakened immune system and so still be at increased risk for complications of COVID-19 infection.

Should I Be Washing My Hands Or Using Sanitizer/Wipes More Often Than Others? Is There A Special Sanitation Regime I Should Be Undertaking?

Hand washing for 20 seconds with soap and water or the use of alcohol gel/sanitiser with a greater than 62% alcohol content on a regular basis is recommended. Touching of the face, eyes or nose with unclean hands is strongly discouraged. When in shared spaces, wipe down surfaces such as desk, chairs, doorknobs, tabletops, airline seat/table (travel is discouraged!) with disinfectant or antiseptic wipes.

Do I Need To Wear A Mask?

If you have symptoms of a cold — cough, runny nose, sore throat or shortness of breath — please wear a surgical mask (especially when in a clinic or a public place) to limit spread to others. Wearing a mask in public just to protect yourself from the virus is not recommended.

Should I Keep My Follow-Up Appointments, Or Is It Better To Avoid The Hospital For The Time Being?

If you are doing well and don't have symptoms, you may not need routine follow-up at this time. As your appointment gets closer, the clinic will contact you about arrangements. This is because avoiding a visit would limit your risk of infection. If you have mild symptoms of fever, runny nose and cough, please stay at home, as you would do for the common cold. However, if you have worsening symptoms or shortness of breath, then contact your doctor and seek medical attention (call ahead so the team can be prepared to take care of you).

All necessary visits and treatment as scheduled by your doctor should be kept, unless you meet one of the above criteria.

We also advise as follows:

- No visitors per patient for both clinic appointments and treatment unless physical assistance is required.
- No visitors under age 18 (because young people may infect others without necessarily being ill themselves).
- All visitors will be screened for flu-like symptoms, such as fever, cough, or sore throat. Any visitor with obvious signs of illness will be sent to the hospital's COVID-19 clinic.
- As always, we ask that you do NOT visit if you have any flu-like symptoms, such as fever, cough, or sore throat.
- We ask that you do NOT visit if you have travelled from or through any area with widespread COVID-19 infection in the past 30 days.

We understand that these changes can be disruptive. However, limiting visitors is one way to reduce the risk of infection to cancer patients from the general population.

If I Have Chemo Scheduled, Should I Postpone It?

If you have no symptoms and feel well, with no history of exposure to COVID-19, the treatment may continue without interruption if your doctor decides this. It must be remembered that chemotherapy can weaken your immune system. Preventative anticancer treatment (so-called adjuvant chemotherapy) might be cancelled because the risks to your health may outweigh the smaller possible benefits. Some patients who are older than 70 years of age and receiving chemotherapy might also need to stop their chemotherapy. However, this treatment decision needs to be made on a case-by-case basis and be discussed between you and your oncologist.

What Should I Do If A Family Member Develops Symptoms?

If your family members develop an illness, they and you must wash hands frequently. Keep surfaces clean and maintain distance from others if possible (e.g., sleep in different rooms, don't eat at a common table, etc.) to minimise the risk of infection. We expect that this can be very difficult for families with children but having a frank discussion with your family about recommended preventive steps could be helpful.

How Will I Be Able To Tell If I Have COVID-19 Or Just The Cold Or Flu?

It will be difficult to distinguish one viral infection from another when experiencing a mild illness, especially with no recent travel history or contact with someone known to have COVID-19. If your symptoms worsen or you develop shortness of breath, you will need routine tests for infection (e.g., influenza) and COVID-19.

COVID Clinic locations

Royal Adelaide Hospital – P: 7074 2997 – opening hours: 9.00am – 8.00pm (7 days per week)

Flinders Medical Centre – opening hours: 10.00am – 8.00pm (7 days a week)

Leyll McEwin Hospital - opening hours: 8.00am – 8.00pm (7 days a week)

Mt Barker Hospital – Community Heath Day Care Centre (Wunderlea building) - opening hours: 9.00am – 5.00pm (7 days a week)

Gawler Women's Health Centre – P: (08) 8521 2000 - opening hours: 9.00am – 5.00pm (7 days a

week). Clinic is closed between 12.00pm and 1.00pm each day

Riverland General Hospital – P: (08) 8580 2400 – It is essential that you phone ahead to speak to a COVID-19 Triage nurse and organise a booking

Please visit SA Health website for further details and a list all other locations

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/health+topics/a+-+z/covid+2019/covid-19+response/covid-19+clinics+and+testing+centres>

Should Cancer Patients Avoid Public Transportation, Travel And Events? What About Survivors And Caregivers? Is It Safe To Leave Home At All?

Social distancing is recommended for cancer patients to limit their risk of acquiring COVID-19. This includes avoiding or limiting time in crowded and closed spaces. These places include a crowded bus or train, movie theatres, malls, sporting arenas, restaurants, etc. Travel should be limited such as air travel and particularly cruise ships. Cancer survivors may have some lingering immune weakness and may still be at risk for serious infection even years after stem cell transplantation. It is important to contact your doctor with any questions.

However, this does not mean that you cannot leave home. You may plan to take walks around a quiet neighborhood and go grocery shopping during off-peak hours if it cannot be done by someone else. We suggest bringing your own grocery bags, disinfecting shopping trolley handles, and wash hands or use hand sanitizer after using the trolley. The most important thing is prevention, and hand hygiene is critical.

Are There Ways To Boost Your Immune System?

Get a good night's sleep. Lack of sleep has been associated with weakened immune systems. There is no substitute for healthy meals. Make sure you are eating lots of vegetables and fruits. There is no proven role of supplements but supplements such as vitamin C may be useful and are not likely to be harmful. Exercise will keep you strong and conditioned, but avoid gyms.

How Can I Deal With My Anxiety Over This Virus?

It is most likely that this virus will be circulating in the community for some time, increasing the likelihood of someone getting it. However, by employing frequent hand hygiene, environmental disinfection, social distancing (including of family members if they are ill) and avoiding travel and crowded places, you can minimise the chances of contracting COVID-19. We also have some trained staff who can provide help as needed.

Lastly, we recommend vaccination for influenza (for both the patient and family members and caregivers). Influenza is still circulating in the community and it is also a major cause of serious infection in patients with weakened immune systems.

For further cancer related information or support, visit Cancer Council or call Cancer Council on 13 11 20

<https://www.cancersa.org.au/cancer-and-covid-19>