

COVID-19 and Cancer Survivors: What Do I Need to Know?

COVID-19 is a new virus that has now spread across the world. We know that this virus has caused worry for everyone. For survivors of childhood, adolescent, and young adult cancers, we know that the worry may be even higher.

As a cancer survivor, you should take extra precautions. Below, you will find some facts that will lessen your chance of catching the infection or transmitting it to others, and will help you know what to do if you think you may have COVID-19.

As a cancer survivor, am I at increased risk for developing COVID-19?

- COVID-19 is very contagious and can spread rapidly throughout communities unless precautions are taken
- While much remains unknown about COVID-19, current information suggests that your cancer history alone does not increase your risk for developing COVID-19 infection
- However, you may have increased risk for contracting COVID-19 if you have lowered immunity to viral infections due to:
 - Certain health conditions, such as chronic graft-versus-host disease
 - Certain medications, such as corticosteroids or immunosuppressant medications used to treat autoimmune diseases (for example, asthma, lupus, and arthritis) or medications that prevent or treat graft or organ rejection (for example, after bone marrow or solid organ transplant)
 - Current or recent (within the past 6 months) treatment with chemotherapy

As a cancer survivor, am I at increased risk for complications if I get COVID-19?

- There is currently limited information available about cancer survivors who have developed COVID-19 infection
- Based on what is known about other viral respiratory illnesses, it is likely that survivors who have chronic health conditions affecting the heart or lungs may be at higher risk for complications if they develop COVID-19 infection. These include conditions such as:
 - Pulmonary fibrosis (lung scarring) or chronic lung disease
 - Cardiomyopathy (weakened heart muscle) or coronary artery disease
- It is also possible that survivors who received treatments that may damage the heart or lungs may be at increased risk for complications if they develop COVID-19 infection. These treatments include:
 - Anthracycline chemotherapy (such as doxorubicin and daunorubicin)
 - Bleomycin, busulfan, carmustine, or lomustine chemotherapy
 - Radiation involving the heart or lungs, including total body irradiation (TBI) and radiation to the chest, axilla, abdomen, or spine

- In addition, based on what is known in the general population, certain health conditions may increase the risk for complications related to COVID-19 infection. These include conditions such as:
 - Diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - High blood pressure (hypertension)
 - Lung disease (asthma, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD])
 - Chronic kidney disease requiring dialysis
 - Liver disease
 - Smoking or vaping
 - Severe obesity (body mass index (BMI) of 40 or more)
 - Being over the age of 60 years

If you have any of these conditions, it is important that you take steps to keep them well controlled. If you are running low on any of your medications for these condition(s), contact your health care provider for refills.

How is the COVID-19 virus spread?

- The virus is spread by coming in contact with droplets from the respiratory system of an infected person.
- These droplets can spew out of an infected person's nose or mouth (such as when they speak, cough or sneeze) and they can travel about 6 feet.
- The droplets then can stay on surfaces where they land, such as on countertops. Or if the infected person has touched the droplets with their hands (such as when wiping their nose, or covering their mouth when they cough), the droplets can be transferred to other surfaces, such as door knobs, light switches, phones, keyboards, water faucets, gas pump handles, etc.
- If an infected droplet comes in contact with your eyes, nose, or mouth, it can cause you to become infected. This includes whether the droplet comes directly from the infected person, or whether you touch an infected surface.

How can I protect myself from getting infected with COVID-19?

- **Follow the principles of social distancing:**
 - Keep 6 feet of distance between you and other people, if at all possible
 - Avoid social gatherings and crowds of people
 - Avoid mass transit (such as buses and subways)
 - Stay at home as much as possible, and stay away from anyone who is sick
- **Practice good hygiene:**
 - Wash your hands very frequently – at least once an hour when you are awake – with soap and water for at least 20 seconds each time. This includes while you are at home.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth

- Clean high-touch surfaces, such as phones, keyboards, doorknobs, light switches, and countertops using antibacterial wipes or household cleaners at least once a day
- Do not shake hands or hug other people
- Do not share household items (such as cups and towels) with others
- **Take good care of yourself:**
 - Eat right
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Reduce stress as much as possible
 - If you work or go to school, ask to work or take classes at home. Get a letter from your health care provider to support this, if needed.
 - Follow COVID-19 recommendations as advised by your national and/or local authorities

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

- **The most common symptoms are:**
 - Fever
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- **Symptoms may also include:**
 - Tiredness
 - Aches
 - Runny nose
 - Sore throat
 - Diarrhea or nausea
 - Loss of taste or smell

What should I do if I am not feeling well and think that I may have COVID-19?

- In non-emergency situations, call ahead for medical advice before visiting your health care provider or hospital, so that you can determine what next steps are needed
- Be sure to tell your health care provider that you are a cancer survivor
- If you have chronic health conditions or are taking medications that increase your risk for getting COVID-19 infection, be sure to tell your health care provider
- If you have chronic health conditions that may increase your risk for complications related to COVID-19 infection (for example, heart or lung problems, or diabetes), be sure to tell your health care provider
- If you have been told that the cancer treatment you received places you at high risk for lung or heart problems (such as from chest radiation or certain chemotherapies), be sure to tell your health care provider
- Bring your cancer treatment summary with you if you are told to go to the clinic or hospital

Is there anything else I can do?

- We recognize that this is a stressful time for everyone
- COVID-19 information continues to change daily
- Please talk to your survivorship care team about any questions or worries you may have during this time

Additional health information for childhood cancer survivors is available at
www.survivorshipguidelines.org

Note: Throughout this *Health Links* series, the term “childhood cancer” is used to designate pediatric cancers that may occur during childhood, adolescence, or young adulthood. Health Links are designed to provide health information for survivors of pediatric cancer, regardless of whether the cancer occurred during childhood, adolescence, or young adulthood.

Disclaimer and Notice of Proprietary Rights

Introduction to Late Effects Guidelines and Health Links: *The Long-Term Follow-Up Guidelines for Survivors of Childhood, Adolescent, and Young Adult Cancers* and accompanying *Health Links* were developed by the Children's Oncology Group as a collaborative effort of the Late Effects Committee and Nursing Discipline and are maintained and updated by the Children's Oncology Group's Long-Term Follow-Up Guidelines Core Committee and its associated Task Forces.

To cancer patients (if children, their parents or legal guardians): Please seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition and do not rely on the Informational Content. The Children's Oncology Group is a research organization and does not provide individualized medical care or treatment.

To physicians and other healthcare providers: The Informational Content is not intended to replace your independent clinical judgment, medical advice, or to exclude other legitimate criteria for screening, health counseling, or intervention for specific complications of childhood cancer treatment. Neither is the Informational Content intended to exclude other reasonable alternative follow-up procedures. The Informational Content is provided as a courtesy, but not intended as a sole source of guidance in the evaluation of childhood cancer survivors. The Children's Oncology Group recognizes that specific patient care decisions are the prerogative of the patient, family, and healthcare provider.

No endorsement of any specific tests, products, or procedures is made by Informational Content, the Children's Oncology Group, or affiliated party or member of the Children's Oncology Group.

No Claim to Accuracy or Completeness: While the Children's Oncology Group has made every attempt to assure that the Informational Content is accurate and complete as of the date of publication, no warranty or representation, express or implied, is made as to the accuracy, reliability, completeness, relevance, or timeliness of such Informational Content.

No Liability on Part of Children's Oncology Group and Related Parties/Agreement to Indemnify and Hold Harmless the Children's Oncology Group and Related Parties: No liability is assumed by the Children's Oncology Group or any affiliated party or member thereof for damage resulting from the use, review, or access of the Informational Content. You agree to the following terms of indemnification: (i) “Indemnified Parties” include authors and contributors to the Informational Content, all officers, directors, representatives, employees, agents, and members of the Children's Oncology Group and affiliated organizations; (ii) by using, reviewing, or accessing the Informational Content, you agree, at your own expense, to indemnify, defend and hold harmless Indemnified Parties from any and all losses, liabilities, or damages (including attorneys' fees and costs) resulting from any and all claims, causes of action, suits, proceedings, or demands related to or arising out of use, review or access of the Informational Content.

Proprietary Rights: The Informational Content is subject to protection under the copyright law and other intellectual property law in the United States and worldwide. The Children's Oncology Group retains exclusive copyright and other right, title, and interest to the Informational Content and claims all intellectual property rights available under law. You hereby agree to help the Children's Oncology Group secure all copyright and intellectual property rights for the benefit of the Children's Oncology Group by taking additional action at a later time, action which could include signing consents and legal documents and limiting dissemination or reproduction of Informational Content.