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What Cancer Patients Need to Know About COVID-19

Information for people with cancer and their families

Read this brochure to learn:

- what is COVID-19
- who is at risk
- how to protect yourself and the people around you
- where to find reliable information
- how to manage stress and anxiety about COVID-19

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new coronavirus first detected in late 2019.

Coronaviruses are a type of virus that can cause the common cold, bronchitis, pneumonia and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is still new and experts are studying how it spreads.

Current research shows that COVID-19 spreads through large droplets. A person who has COVID-19 spreads these droplets when they sneeze or cough.

- The droplets can get into the eyes, nose or mouth of people close by (within 2 metres or 6 feet).
- Droplets also land on surfaces. People may touch the surface and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Most people with COVID-19 have mild respiratory (breathing) symptoms, including:

- a fever over 38 °C (100.4 °F)
- new or worsening cough
- shortness of breath
- muscle aches and pains
- sore throat
- runny nose

Some people are at a higher risk of developing more serious symptoms or complications because they have health problems that make the illness worse.

Who is most at risk?

People who have a weakened immune system have the highest risk of getting seriously sick. People with weakened immune systems may include:

- older adults
- people with chronic diseases (for example, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, kidney disease or chronic lung disease)
- people having cancer treatments, or who have finished their cancer treatments recently

What do I need to know about COVID-19 if I am being treated for cancer?

Some treatments for cancer, especially chemotherapy and radiation therapy, can weaken the immune system during and after therapy. The immune system can stay weakened for weeks after treatment. You may have a higher risk of having COVID-19 or having more serious symptoms if you get it.

Ask your health care provider about getting vaccines for pneumonia, such as Pneumovax and Prevnar, that protect against different types of infection.

See page 5 for the best ways to protect yourself during treatment.

What is the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre doing to keep me safe?

People are being carefully screened when they arrive at UHN hospital entrances.

Expect the screening processes to change as we learn more about the virus. Find up-to-date information on our screening process at www.uhn.ca/covid19 or call your health care team.

Your health care team will do their best to keep your cancer care plan as it is. They may need to make changes to limit your risk.

What can I do to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Call your clinic before coming to the hospital if you have any of these symptoms:

- a fever over 38 °C (100.4 °F)
- new or worsening cough
- shortness of breath
- muscle aches and pains
- sore throat
- runny nose

Tell clinic or booking staff about your symptoms or if you have had close contact with a person who has COVID-19.

Your team will talk about your therapy or treatment and decide:

- if you need to come to the hospital
- if your appointment needs to be rescheduled
- if you can have your appointment through a remote appointment

Remote appointments

Your health care team may offer you a remote appointment instead of an in-person visit to help keep you, other patients and staff safe. This will depend on the type of appointment you have. Your team will only offer it if it is safe to do so.

What is a remote appointment?

A remote appointment is when your health care provider uses technology to care for you without you coming to their office. Princess Margaret has been offering remote appointments for years in many areas and most patients are happy with the care they receive in this way.

A remote appointment could use a phone call or a video call. Your health care provider can diagnose problems you may have and create a treatment plan for you. Your phone or video call will not be recorded or saved.

Clinic staff may ask you what technology you have access to, for example a computer, smartphone or tablet, and what technology you are comfortable and willing to use.

Who can visit Princess Margaret at this time?

Visitors are not allowed in the hospital at this time. This is to protect them from COVID-19. The unit manager may approve visitors (in advance) for a patient in a special situation. Please speak with the unit manager first.

Expect the caregiver and visitor policies to change as we learn more about the virus. Find up-to-date information on our caregiver and visitor policies at www.uhn.ca/covid19 or call your health care team.

What can I do to protect myself, my family and friends?

Take precautions to prevent the virus from spreading. Some of the best ways to protect yourself and others include:

Practice physical distancing

All Canadians are being asked to practice physical distancing. This means keeping people farther apart in person to prevent COVID-19 from spreading.

Some examples of physical distancing are:

- Avoid gatherings, having visitors in your home and going to public places.
- Avoid public transit if you can. If you must use public transit, sit 2 metres away from other people and follow the good hygiene practices below.
- If you have to leave your home for any reason (for example, to come to the hospital or to get groceries) wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth. Stay at least 2 metres away from other people.
- Avoid travelling outside Canada.

Practice good hygiene

- ✓ Wash your hands often with soap and warm water and wash for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand gel. Wash your hands:
 - when you are near or touch other people
 - before eating or touching your face
 - after using the bathroom
 - after coughing or sneezing
 - when entering your home
- ✓ Sneeze or cough into your sleeve or use a tissue and throw it away after each use. Then wash your hands.
- ✓ Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. You could get COVID-19 if you touch a surface that has the virus on it.
- ✓ Clean and disinfect surfaces often. Be sure to clean surfaces that people touch a lot, such as doorknobs, phones, light switches and keyboards.

Keep away from people who are sick or have travelled recently.

- ✓ Avoid people who are sick.
- ✓ Avoid people who have travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days.

Self-isolate if you have symptoms or have travelled recently.

- ✓ Stay home if you are sick.
- ✓ Self-isolate if you travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days.

Self-isolate means to stay at home and monitor yourself for symptoms for 14 days.

Taking all the steps to protect yourself and others helps keep everyone safe, but they are especially important for you as you may have an increased risk due to your cancer or cancer treatment.

What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

If you are worried that you may have COVID-19, you can:

- self-isolate from other people as soon as you notice symptoms
- use this online assessment tool: <https://www.covid19toronto.ca/>
- contact **Telehealth Ontario** at 1 866 797 0000, your [local public health unit](#) or call your primary care provider
- do not visit an assessment centre unless you have been referred by a health care professional

If you are having trouble breathing or experiencing other severe symptoms, call 911 immediately. Tell them that about your symptoms, travel history, and that you have cancer.

How can I manage stress and anxiety about COVID-19?

It is normal to feel stress and anxiety related to COVID-19. Knowing this and paying attention to your mental health is important.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- worsening of chronic health problems
- increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs

Taking care of yourself, your friends and your family can help you cope with stress.

Things you can do to support yourself

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic often can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to relax. Do things you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.

Call the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Psychosocial Oncology main line if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row: 416 946 4525.

Where can I find more information?

Information about COVID-19 is changing quickly. For the most up-to-date information:

- call Telehealth Ontario: 1 866 797 000
- call Toronto Public Health Helpline: 416 338 7600 or 311 after hours
- visit the UHN COVID-19 webpage (<https://www.uhn.ca/covid19>)
- follow UHN Twitter accounts (@UHN; @UHNPatientExp; @ipacuhn; @myUHNPortal)

Access your health record online

Access your health record online through myUHN Patient Portal, a secure website for UHN patients.

With myUHN, you can access your UHN appointments, lab results, clinic notes and reports as soon as they become available from your computer, smartphone or tablet.

For more information or to get your registration code, contact myUHN Support at:

- 416 340 3777
- myUHN@uhn.ca

Learn more at www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/myUHN.