



Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Important advice for people with Cancer

It is an anxious time and you are likely to have questions. This leaflet will provide information for you and your family about how Coronavirus/COVID-19 might affect you if you have cancer.

Based on current evidence, the main symptoms of Coronavirus/COVID-19 are a new cough, a high temperature and, in severe cases, shortness of breath. For the majority of people symptoms will be mild, but for some individuals there is an increased risk of respiratory complications.

Patient safety is our number one priority and we aim to minimise disruption to cancer services. The NHS will continue to provide vital cancer treatments, and emergency and urgent care for all patients. With that in mind we have listed some important information below. This includes answers to questions you may have and directions to service that can offer advice and support.

How might Coronavirus (COVID-19) affect me?

Some people with cancer are more at risk of becoming ill if they contract the Coronavirus/COVID-19 infection.

- All cancer patients may have some weakening of the immune system. Treatments like chemotherapy and radiotherapy increase this.
- Some cancer treatments can make it more difficult for patients to fight infection.

Your cancer treatment plan is individual to you. In all cases, it is important to weigh up the risks and benefits, in particular, the risk of reducing your immunity to infection with cancer therapy and the potential increased risk of infection with Coronavirus/COVID-19 that this might carry.

Your medical professional may want to review your treatment plan with you to ensure it still best suits your needs and discuss any changes that may be appropriate. This will only ever be done to reduce overall risk and harm.

Will my cancer treatment change?

Your clinical team might try to minimise the time you spend in hospital departments, for example arranging telephone consultations and offering blood tests at a different NHS site. Make sure your care provider has your up-to-date contact details.

If you are being treated with chemotherapy or radiotherapy, individual decisions based on the benefits and risks of treatment may have to be made with you if the rate of Coronavirus/COVID-19 infection in the community rises and alternative therapy options involving fewer visits to hospital may be offered to you.

Relatives and friends will likely be discouraged from visiting you in hospital and accompanying you to appointments.





Should I still go to hospital appointments?

It is vital that if you are receiving treatment for cancer, you take extra care of your overall wellbeing, and attending appointments is part of this.

However, it may be that appointments can take place over the telephone or video-link instead.

Please assume all appointments will continue, but check with your clinical team first in case any different arrangements need to be made.

As someone who is being treated for cancer, do I need to do anything differently to reduce the risk of Coronavirus (Covid-19)?

It is important to try to reduce the risk of picking up any infections by:

- wash your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always wash your hands when you get home or into work
- use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards
- avoid close contact with people who have symptoms of coronavirus, coughs or colds
- only travel on public transport if you need to
- work from home, if you can
- avoid social activities, such as going to pubs, restaurants, theatres and cinemas and the gym
- avoid events with large groups of people
- use the phone to contact your GP surgery or other NHS services

Will the symptoms be different because I have cancer and what should I look out for?

NHS Inform outlines the common symptoms of Coronavirus/COVID-19, which are a new cough and/or a fever.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

Coronavirus can have serious effects on anyone who has a long-term health condition or a weakened immune system, including some people with cancer. You should follow the advice to avoid catching or spreading germs.

Get advice immediately if you are in contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus by calling 111 or by contacting your clinical oncology team.





What should I do if I am a carer for someone with cancer and have been exposed to the virus?

NHS Inform Scotland provides up to date advice about Coronavirus/COVID-19

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

We recommend everyone follows the NHS and Government advice about what to do if they are concerned they have come into contact with someone with coronavirus.

If you have been in close contact with someone with confirmed coronavirus, call 111 (England, Scotland and Wales) or 0300 200 7885 (Northern Ireland). **Tell the person you speak to about the type of cancer and the treatment you had.**

If you are advised by 111 staff or other medical professionals to self-isolate then this would include minimising close contact with others.

Where can I call for support?

If you have concerns related to cancer or your treatment your first point of contact should be your cancer clinical team.

The NHS Inform Scotland website has up-to-date information and answers to frequently asked questions.

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

For general information and any concerns about Coronavirus / COVID-19 you can call 0800 028 2816 (COVID-19 helpline)

Cancer Research UK nurses can be contacted on 0808 800 4040 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Macmillan has a Cancer Support Line on 0808 808 00 00 (every day, 8am – 8pm)

For other non-emergency health concerns, your first point of contact should still be your GP or 111. They are likely to assess you over the telephone or via video link rather than in person to reduce the risk of infection from COVID-19.

Who should I contact if I become unwell or develop side effects while on systemic anti-cancer therapy?

If you have chest pain, significant bleeding or you need immediate medical attention call 999.

If you have a temperature or shivering or flu-like symptoms while you are on systemic anti-cancer therapy, or for any side effects of drug treatment, call your local cancer treatment helpline, or the national Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711. They will ask a series of questions and will give advice or arrange for you to have a medical review at your nearest hospital.





Social distancing saves lives



Stop all unnecessary contact



Avoid pubs, restaurants and other busy spaces



If you have symptoms, self-isolate for 7 days (or 14 days if someone you live with has symptoms)



Stop all unnecessary travel



Work from home where possible

Find out more at www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

