

COVID-19 and cancer: What you need to know

You may be worried about COVID-19 and have questions about how it will affect you and your cancer care. Here's what you need to know:

- Cancer and some cancer treatments may weaken your immune system, which means you may be at a higher risk of getting seriously ill from a COVID-19 infection.
- You may be tested for COVID-19 during your visit to a hospital or cancer centre as a precaution or if you have symptoms.
- COVID-19 can cause very mild symptoms (such as a cough) to severe pneumonia (lung infections). Severe symptoms can be life-threatening and need to be treated at the hospital.
- It is important for people with cancer, as well as their family, friends and caregivers, to know how to keep themselves safe during this time.

How to protect yourself from COVID-19:

To protect yourself and reduce the risk of being exposed to the virus:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- **Stay at home.** Only go out for medical appointments that must take place in person, and to get fresh air and exercise.
- If you have to go out, stay at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from people you do not live with.
- Try to have groceries and other household items delivered to your home or ask someone else to pick them up for you. Pay for deliveries online or over the phone. Wash your hands after accepting a delivery.
- While there are no special precautions needed when storing food, wash your hands after putting away food that has been purchased and before preparing food. Wash fruits and vegetables under running, potable water.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.

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- Clean high touch surface areas as much as possible, such as door handles, hand rails, phones, computers and tablets, remote controls and light switches.

How your cancer treatment may change:

- Your cancer care may change during COVID-19 to allow you to stay at home and away from crowded places.
- Your cancer care team may make changes to your treatment plan and can include:
 - Changing the date of your next appointment
 - Changing an in-person appointment to be done over the telephone or a video conference
 - Changing how often you receive treatments or postponing them to a later date
 - Changing your treatment, such as to a different type of chemotherapy

It is normal to feel nervous or worried if your cancer treatment plan has changed. Talk to your cancer care team about your concerns.

If you go to the hospital for an appointment:

- You will be screened at the entrance of the hospital. Screening might include answering some questions about how you are feeling.
- Only patients are allowed to enter the hospital. You can bring your cell phone to your appointment so that those who would have gone with you can listen and ask questions.
- Stay 2 metres (6 feet) away from other patients. Hospital staff will do their best to make this easier.
- Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer often, especially if you have touched anything in the hospital and before entering and after leaving the hospital.
- Wear a cloth face mask if you have one. Wearing a mask can protect healthcare providers and other patients in case you are sick but have not yet shown symptoms.

If you need more of your medication(s):

- Call your pharmacy to ask for a refill.
- During this time, all medication refills will be for a one-month supply of medication.
- You can request another refill when the one-month supply is almost finished (about a week before your current supply will finish).
- Check to see if your pharmacy can deliver your medication to your home or ask someone to pick it up for you.

What to do if you do not feel well:

If you are currently having cancer treatment, call your cancer clinic first if you have any of the symptoms below. Continue to contact them as usual for any symptoms related to your cancer or cancer treatment.

If you are not currently getting treatment, or if you are unable to speak with your cancer care team, call your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse) or Telehealth Ontario at **1-866-797-0000**.

Stay home if you have symptoms of COVID-19, such as:

- Fever
- Cough
- Mild difficulty breathing
- Achy muscles
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Runny nose

For the most up-to-date list of COVID-19 symptoms, visit: ontario.ca/page/covid-19-stop-spread.

Only call 911 if it is an emergency, such as feeling like you cannot breathe.

How to take care of yourself during this time:

- Your health care team is there for you. If you are very worried about COVID-19, you should ask for help.
- If you find it upsetting to hear about COVID-19, try limiting your time watching, reading, or listening to news stories.
- Take care of your body. Eat healthy, be active, and get plenty of sleep.
- Make time to relax and do things you enjoy, such as reading, listening to music, cooking, or watching a movie.
- Stay connected with friends and loved ones through telephone or video chats. Social distancing refers to the physical distance between people. It does not mean social isolation.
- Alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs can worsen your health and well-being. Talk to your healthcare team if this affects you.

For more information:

For more information on **COVID-19** visit:

- Ontario Ministry of Health: [Ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus)
- Health Canada: [Canada.ca/covid-19](https://canada.ca/covid-19)

For more information or to speak with someone about **cancer**:

The Canadian Cancer Society's Cancer Information Service:

- Visit cancer.ca/cis
- Or call **1-888-939-3333**

For more information or to speak with someone about your **emotional well-being or mental health**:

Bounceback Ontario (for help with managing low mood, mild to moderate depression, anxiety, stress or worry):

- Visit bouncebackontario.ca or call 1-866-345-0224

ConnexOntario (Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Helpline):

- Visit connexontario.ca or call **1-866-531-2600**

The information set out in this information sheet is intended to be used by health professionals and patients for informational purposes only. A patient should always consult a healthcare provider if he/she has any questions regarding the information set out in this sheet. The information is not intended to act as or replace medical advice and should not be relied upon in any such regard.

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