Questions and Answers to Issues Related to Coronavirus and COVID-19

Do I have a higher risk to get COVID-19 if I have Cancer?
Yes:
• Especially Cancer patients older than 60 years
• Especially Cancer patients with other existing chronic conditions like diabetes, heart conditions, lung disease and those who have a history of any form of tissue transplant

Do people with Cancer have a weakened immune system?
Yes, refer to rest of document for additional information.

Does treatment with Cancer medication and/or radiation therapy increase the risk of Coronavirus infection?
Yes – including:
• Chemotherapy (any form)
• Hormone-based therapy
• Endocrine therapy
• Anti-angiogenic modalities
• Immunotherapy
• Dendritic cell-based immunotherapy
• Targeted therapy
• Adjuvant therapy
• Biological therapy
• Stem cell transplant in last 12 to 24 months
• Bone marrow transplant in last 12 to 24 months
• Steroid therapy
• Receiving any antibody treatment for cancer
• Radiation therapy in the last nine (9) months

What should I do to avoid Coronavirus infection?
• Wash your hands frequently with soap and water (for at least 20 seconds)
• Use a hand sanitizer (at least 62% alcohol-based) when soap and water in not available
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
• Stay at home as much as possible
• Avoid non-essential travel
• Avoid crowded places
• Stay at least 2 metres away from other people
• Avoid physical contact with others
• Wear a double layer cloth mask (with filter if available)
• Make sure you have access to several weeks supply of medication in case you have to stay at home for a prolonged period of time
• Ensure that your ordinary flu vaccinations is up to date – should your regular flu vaccination not be up to date and you develop flu-like symptoms it may be more difficult for the doctor to decide whether you should be tested for COVID-19 or not
• Do not forget to ensure that you continue with treatment for any possible co-morbidities like, diabetes, high blood pressure, etc
• Live a healthy lifestyle
• Do not smoke
• Avoid alcohol consumption

What should I do if I am a Cancer patient and have COVID-19 symptoms?
Contact your treating physician or oncologist by phone immediate
Do not go to the doctor’s consulting rooms or a hospital unless instructed to do so

Should I do regular health checks, tests or blood tests even though I do not have any symptoms of COVID-19?
Yes. Discuss this with your treating physician or oncologist for guidance

Will people with Cancer be more severely affected by Coronavirus?
Yes, Cancer and/or its treatment negatively affects the immune system which increases the risk of severe COVID-19

Do I need specific treatment if I contract Coronavirus?
There is currently no specific treatment or vaccination for COVID-19
Contact your treating physician or oncologist

Will the situation with Coronavirus lead to shortages of my Cancer medication or treatment?
Shortages of certain medications may become a problem – make sure that you have access to several weeks essential Cancer medication to see you through

Is it OK to postpone my Cancer treatment because of COVID-19?
Cancer treatment should not be postponed or interrupted as this may negatively impact on being cured and may affect ultimate survival
Can I visit my Doctor/Clinic/Hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic?
• Do not visit the office of your treating physician, oncologist, clinic or hospital unless you are specifically instructed to do so
• Contact your treating physician or oncologist by phone

If I must self-isolate, how will I get my Cancer medication/treatment?
Have the medication delivered if a delivery service is available
Otherwise request a family member or friend to collect your medication

If I have questions, who can I ask?
Contact your treating physician or oncologist
Contact the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) on the toll-free number: 0800 22 66 22

Some Additional Comments:
A recent Chinese study of patients with Cancer who had VVID-19 showed:
• Patients who underwent chemotherapy or surgery in the previous months had a higher risk compared to those who had not received recent treatment
• The risk appears to be higher in patients with more than one chronic medical condition
• Patients who are undergoing active Cancer treatment are presumably at higher risk than those who are in remission
• Patients who are in the first year after stem cell transplantation or CT T-Cell therapy could be at higher risk for complications if they get infected with COVID-19
• Those individuals who are beyond one year after transplantation may still be considered to be immunocompromised and may remain at an elevated risk for complications