



Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSAs)

COVID-19 Risk Factors for Cancer Patients and Survivors

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 is not available
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth

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- 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-10 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 COVID-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