

# Oncology patients, chemotherapy and COVID-19



So far, it is still unclear if and to what extent cancer patients are at a higher risk of catching COVID-19 due to a lack of robust evidence.

**Categories at risk include:** If you suffer from diabetes or a cardiovascular disease, it is extra important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease.



Patients having chemotherapy, or who have received chemotherapy in the last 3 months



Patients receiving extensive radiotherapy



People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppressive drugs



People with some types of blood or lymphatic system cancer which damage the immune system, even if they have not needed treatment (for example, chronic leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma).

Specific risk groups are cancer patients with an impaired immune system such as:







- Leukocytopenia
- Long lasting immunosuppression (steroids, antibodies)
- Co-infections of the upper airways may increase the risk of an adverse outcome in patients with viral infections; especially, co-infections caused by bacteria and fungi.
- Low immunoglobulin levels

**Protective measures:** Follow the international protective measures as advised by the World Health Organization.

## PREVENT:

1. Wash your hands with soap and water or, if not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Avoid contact with sick people, in particular with those with a cough.
3. Avoid touching your face, nose and eyes.
4. Practice social distancing. Stay home if possible.

## RECOGNISE:

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- Fever
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- Coughing
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- Sore throat
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- Difficulty breathing
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- Muscle pain
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- Tiredness

## TAKE ACTION:

Call your doctor when returning from a risk region, after contact with an infected person, or when feeling symptoms suspicious for COVID-19.

DO NOT go directly to your doctor, clinic/hospital if you have a fever or other symptoms, to avoid potential spread of the infection. Call them first and follow the instructions they give you.

1. Explore telephonic or web-conferencing capabilities for consultation
2. Discuss the benefits and risks of maintenance therapies and the options of “therapy holidays” during the pandemic.
3. Discuss options of regimens and schedules that reduce the number of hospital visits during the pandemic (three or two-weekly as opposed to weekly, oral or subcutaneous alternatives as opposed to intravenous administration).
4. Ask for psychosocial support if you feel overwhelmed.