



Coronavirus (COVID-19) Important advice for people with Cancer Version 2 - UPDATED 27th March 2020

This leaflet provides you and your family information about how Coronavirus/COVID-19 might affect you if you have cancer.

The main symptoms of Coronavirus/COVID-19 are a new and consistent cough, a high temperature (above 37.8°C) 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 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 services 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 think about the risks and benefits. Since some cancer treatments make it more difficult to fight infection, there is potential increased risk of infection with Coronavirus/COVID-19 that such treatments 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.

Some people with specific cancers should receive a letter from NHS Scotland outlining more specific advice to keep themselves safe.

Who should I contact if I become unwell or develop side effects while on treatment for cancer?

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 treatment for cancer, 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.





Where can I call for support?

If you have concerns related to cancer or your treatment you should contact your cancer clinical team.

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

www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

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 Cancer Support has a support line on 0808 808 00 00 (every day, 9am – 5pm)

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

Will my cancer treatment change?

Your clinical team will 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 as the rate of Coronavirus/COVID-19 infection in the community rises. Different therapy options involving fewer visits to hospital may be offered to you. A lot of surgical procedures now carry far greater risks due to COVID-19. Because of this, other treatment plans may be proposed and discussed with you.

Can I be visited in hospital or accompanied to appointments?

Being visited by friends or relatives in hospital, or someone going with you to appointments is now restricted unless essential. The following visits are deemed essential:

- a person receiving end-of-life care
- to support someone with a mental health issue such as dementia, a learning disability or autism where not being present would cause the patient to be distressed
- to accompany a child in hospital.

If relatives or friends need to visit you, it is vital that they wash their hands for at least 20 seconds on arrival and often after that.





Should I still go to hospital appointments?

If you are receiving treatment for cancer it is important that you take extra care of your overall wellbeing. Attending appointments is part of this. However, it is likely 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.

I am part of the group who are identified as at higher risk of illness and got a letter from the NHS. Is there something I need to do differently to reduce the risk of Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

The safest course of action is for you to stay at home at all times and avoid all face-to-face contact for at least twelve weeks, except from carers and healthcare workers who you must see as part of your medical care. The rest of your household should support you to stay safe and closely follow guidance on social distancing, reducing their contact inside and outside the home. This will help protect you by stopping you from coming into contact with the virus.

I did not receive a letter from the NHS, but I am currently being treated for cancer. Is there something I need to do differently to reduce the risk of Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

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

- staying at home as much as possible
- 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 it is essential
- work from home, if you can
- 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.

www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

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 NHS 111 or by contacting your cancer team. Remember to let the person you speak to know that you've had treatment for cancer.



What should I do to collect my routine medications?

If you are running out of your routine medications, and need to collect your next prescription you should seek help from a friend/family member to deliver it to you. You can also contact your local pharmacy to arrange for a volunteer to deliver your medication.

You may also need to arrange for collection or delivery of hospital specialist medication that is prescribed to you by your hospital care team.

As we are being asked to stay at home for a prolonged period, how can I maintain a positive mental health?

We understand that the situation you may be facing at the moment due to COVID-19 and your health condition can increase anxiety. In order to ensure you are looking after your mental health there are a few tips you can follow:

- look for ideas for exercises to do at home, the NHS website is a good starting point
- spend time doing things you enjoy – reading, cooking and other indoor hobbies
- try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals and exercise regularly
- try to avoid smoking and alcohol
- try spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air and natural light

Are my carers, and/ or friends and family still allowed to visit my home?

The new guidelines state that we must all stay at home apart from essential tasks and work. If you have a carer or visitor who supports you with essential everyday tasks, they are still able to come to your home. We do advise that upon arrival, and often throughout their visit, they wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.

If you rely on a carer, it would be a good idea to discuss options in the case that they were to fall ill and unable to visit/ provide care for you.



**CORONAVIRUS
PROTECTING YOURSELF AND OTHERS:**



Stay at home



Only go outside for essential food, health and work reasons.



Stay two metres (six feet) away from other people.



Wash your hands regularly and soon as you get home.