



COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and Cancer: Information if you are a patient or carer

Version 4 UPDATED 24th April 2020

This leaflet is for you if you have cancer or you care for someone who has cancer.

COVID-19 is the illness caused by the new coronavirus first identified in China. It can cause a cough and/or a high temperature.

If you have cancer, the COVID-19 outbreak might impact on you in a number of ways. Generally, COVID-19 can cause worse symptoms in people whose immune systems do not work well, older people and people with long term conditions like cancer.



Your cancer treatment might change. This is to keep you safe, because the COVID-19 infection presents a new risk. Your medical team will discuss any changes with you. Some safer options might be delaying treatment or reducing the intensity of treatment.

If you are on treatment for cancer or have received treatment in the past 6 weeks, it is very important to phone for advice if you become unwell.



Any cancer patient worried about symptoms should call their existing **cancer treatment helpline or the national Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711.**

For individuals in a high risk group without family or community support or online access, please call 0800 111 4000 to receive support. (Amended 24 April)

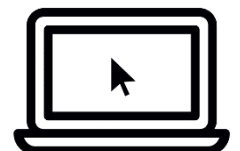
For general information about COVID-19 call 0800 028 2816

Cancer Research UK call 0808 800 4040 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)

Macmillan Cancer Support call 0808 808 00 00 (every day, 9am - 5pm)

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

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus>



More specific information follows overleaf





This leaflet provides information about how COVID-19 might affect you if you have cancer. This includes answers to questions you may have and directions to services that can offer advice and support.

The Scottish Cancer Coalition, a group of charities who support those with cancer, are providing a range of support services from mental wellbeing to financial and welfare advice. You can find a summary of their services on [Voluntary Health Scotland](#). (Amended 24 April)

Should I still attend hospital for cancer appointments?

Clinical teams will minimise the time you spend in hospitals, and will be using telephone and video consultations where possible. You should keep any appointments you have, but call your team to check in case there are any changes to the arrangements of it.

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.

What does this mean for my cancer treatment?

We know that COVID19 is a very significant new risk in relation to cancer treatment and our absolute priority is your safety.

As soon as the impact of COVID-19 was recognised, cancer specialists across the country have been working together to plan different ways of delivering safe treatment. There is a balance of trying to make treatment as safe as possible for you, whilst still being as effective as possible. For some patients this means your initial treatment plans will change.

All cancer patients will have some degree of immunosuppression (where your immune system is not working as well as it usually does), and treatments like chemotherapy and radiotherapy increase this. Those immunosuppressed are more likely to fare badly if infected with COVID-19. If not infected, the ability to manage side effects from anti-cancer treatments may be compromised due to a stretched healthcare system. (Amended 24 April)





Some safer options may include:

- Deferring the start of intensive treatments (including surgery). This may be offered where alternative 'holding' therapies are available, or where risks or harm from the treatment are particularly high for you
- Changing the intensity of treatment, shortening the planned course or building in a break in treatment, to better manage the risk of catching COVID-19 while your immune system is not working as well as usual

Where you do have any intensive treatments delayed, you will remain priority for treatment once the risks of COVID19 have reduced.

Surgery carries far greater risks in light of COVID19 and many non-urgent surgeries are being postponed.

These decisions will always be made in discussion with you.

We understand how distressing this can be for the individuals affected, and their families, but these new approaches are being taken to minimise risks.

What should I do if I become unwell while on treatment for cancer?

If you are on treatment for cancer, it is very important to phone for advice if you become unwell.

Remember: symptoms can start for reasons other than COVID-19. Any cancer patient worried about symptoms should call their existing **cancer treatment helpline or the national Cancer Treatment Helpline 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.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are a new continuous cough and/or a fever/high temperature (37.8°C or greater).

A new continuous cough is where you:

- have a new cough that's lasted for an hour
- have had 3 or more episodes of coughing in 24 hours
- are coughing more than usual

A high temperature is feeling hot to the touch on your chest or back (you don't need to measure your temperature). You may feel warm, cold or shivery. Some people will have more serious symptoms, including pneumonia or difficulty breathing, which might require admission to hospital.

If you have chest pain, significant bleeding or you need immediate medical attention call 999.





I am the parent/ carer of a child with cancer. What should I do if they have a high temperature?

As a parent or carer of a child or young person with cancer, you may be aware that guidance has been issued nationally that people who have cancer and are receiving active chemotherapy and/or have leukaemia or lymphoma, should follow shielding guidance. It is therefore very understandable that you may have experienced worries about bringing your child to hospital in case of exposure to the virus. However, children and young people on chemotherapy are at risk of serious bacterial infection which can be overwhelming. **It is therefore essential that you please do not delay in reporting a temperature to your clinical team and attending for treatment.**

There is a well-established pathway through Accident and Emergency for children with temperatures and all appropriate measures are in place to protect children from exposure to COVID 19. Staff are wearing the correct PPE at the correct time and will be following recent advice to wear face masks at all times.

If you are the parent or carer of a child or young person with cancer you will be particularly anxious about what you should and can do to help and protect them at this time. Alongside the clinical advice provided in this leaflet there is further advice available on the [Parent Club](#) webpage on how to support your child at this difficult time. (Amended 24 April)

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 about Coronavirus / COVID-19 call 0800 028 2816

If you receive the flu jab for health reasons (eg. receiving certain cancer treatments), a national helpline is operating to help you access the services you need. If you cannot leave your home and cannot get help online please call 0800 111 4000. (Amended 24 April)

Cancer Research UK nurses call 0808 800 4040 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Macmillan Cancer Support call 0808 808 00 00 (every day, 9am – 5pm)

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

Lots of cancer charities are also offering support at this time – please see a list of their services on [Voluntary Health Scotland](#). (Amended 24 April)





I have received a letter from the NHS advising me to stay at home. What should I do differently?

Individuals that are being asked to 'shield' will have received, or will receive shortly, a letter from the NHS. Shielding is a measure to protect people at greatest risk from coronavirus, by minimising all interaction between them and others. An overview of who is included in this group of 'extremely high risk' people can be found on [NHS Inform](#). If you are part of the group being asked to shield, we would advise you to stay at home for at least 12 weeks and to minimise your face-to-face contact in order to reduce your risk of coming in contact with the coronavirus. Further guidance will be provided in the letter.

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 COVID-19?

It is important to try to reduce the risk of picking up any infections, as outlined in the NHS Inform social distancing advice, by:

- staying at home as much as possible
- washing your hands with soap and water often – do this for at least 20 seconds
- always washing your hands when you get home or into work
- using hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- putting used tissues in the bin immediately and wash your hands afterwards
- avoiding close contact with people who have symptoms of coronavirus, coughs or colds
- only travelling on public transport if it is essential
- working from home, if you can
- using the phone to contact your GP surgery or other NHS services

If you are concerned that you have not received a letter and believe that your underlying health condition or cancer treatment puts you at increased risk, please contact your GP or hospital specialist to discuss.





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. If you cannot access family or community support, please call 0800 111 4000 to access support in collecting your medications. (Amended 24 April)

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

You do not need to “save up” medicines for months ahead. The supply of medicines is still continuing.

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
- seek support through one of the Scottish Cancer Coalition charities

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

At the moment, 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. In addition, see the [Voluntary Health Scotland](#) website which lists a range of support offered from a number of cancer charities in Scotland.

(Amended 24 April)

