

MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT

Cancer and Coronavirus (COVID-19)

We understand that people with cancer are worried about coronavirus. Here is the latest guidance.

Cancer and coronavirus (COVID-19)

If you have cancer, you might be worried about how coronavirus affects you. The most important thing is to follow the advice from the NHS and your healthcare team.

People with cancer may be at a higher risk of infection, so please follow the advice that will help reduce the risk of getting coronavirus (COVID-19). This page includes advice and information from the NHS and GOV.UK

It's understandable that people with cancer may be feeling more anxious. We're here if you need emotional help.

Following new guidance issued by the UK government on Sunday 22nd March, we have updated our information.

- The Government has issued guidance for people who are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) because of an underlying health conditions. Please visit gov.UK website to see this guidance.
- If you live in a household with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection, you need to self-isolate. Please visit gov.UK website for guidance on home isolation.
- There is new advice for everyone in the UK about social distancing and protecting older people and vulnerable people. Please visit gov.UK website for guidance on social distancing

Symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19)

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are recent onset of:

- new continuous cough and/or
- high temperature

People living with cancer

Do I need to do anything differently as someone who is being treated / in remission from cancer / living with a chronic cancer?

The Government is advising that people with cancer should be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures. They are:

1. Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough.
2. Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible.
3. Work from home, where possible. Your employer should support you to do this. Please refer to employer guidance for more information.
4. Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs.
5. Avoid gatherings with friends and family. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.
6. Use telephone or online services to contact your GP or other essential services.

The detailed advice about social distancing can be found [here](#).

Some people with cancer are more at risk of becoming seriously ill if they contract the COVID-19 infection:

- people having chemotherapy, or who have received chemotherapy in the last three months;
- people having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer;
- people having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors;
- people having intensive (radical) radiotherapy for lung cancer;
- people who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last six months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs;
- people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment.

If you are in this category, the NHS will directly contact you with advice about the more stringent measures you should take in order to keep yourself and others safe. For now, you should rigorously follow the social distancing advice in full.

What will happen to my cancer treatment?

- **Will it be postponed?**
- **Should I still go to hospital appointments?**
- **How will my hospital decide whether I am a priority for treatment? Will there be national rules?**
- **Should I start chemotherapy treatment (particularly if it is a 2nd/3rd line for "mop up") or postpone?**
- **If I get the virus and recover, will this affect my cancer treatment and outlook?**

Your clinician may want to review your treatment plans, including whether the risks involved in any treatment have changed. In some cases, this may lead to a discussion about a revised or modified treatment plan. This is because the risks and benefits of certain treatments may be different in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) risk

Many hospitals have started to use more telephone consultations as a way of helping people to avoid long waits in clinics and for treatment. You may be called to arrange your treatments in this way, and planned treatments may need to be moved to help with running a smooth service.

Your clinical team are best placed to talk with you about the effect on your treatment and appointments. They will work with you to determine the best course of action in each individual situation. If you have any concerns or questions about your treatment, please speak to your clinical team.

I am on chemotherapy, if I experience sweats / cough / shivering, should I call NHS 111 the chemotherapy care line?

The advice in this situation is to immediately contact the chemotherapy care line, the Acute Oncology Service at your treating hospital or whatever number you were given by your team in the event of an urgent query. The important thing is to get urgent medical advice.

Will there be problems accessing my cancer drugs?

There are currently no medicine shortages as a result of COVID-19. The country is well prepared to deal with any impacts of the coronavirus and we have stockpiles of generic drugs like paracetamol in the event of any supply issues. The Government is working closely with industry, the NHS and others in the supply chain to ensure patients can access the medicines they need, and precautions are in place to prevent future shortages.

There is no need for patients to change the way they order prescriptions or take their medicines. Patients should always follow the advice of doctors, pharmacists or other prescribers who prescribe and dispense their medicines and medical products. The NHS has tried-and-tested ways of making sure patients receive their medicines and medical products, even under difficult circumstances. If patients order extra prescriptions, or stockpile, it will put pressure on stocks, meaning that some patients may not get the medicines or medical products they need.

Home isolation

Please visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) website for guidance on home isolation.

Current government guidelines suggest those who need to home isolate are:

- People with symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus (COVID-19) and do not require hospital treatment.

- Those living in households with someone who shows symptoms that may be caused by coronavirus (COVID-19).

If I need to self-isolate for more than seven days, what will happen in relation to treatment that has to be done weekly?

Your clinical team are best placed to talk with you about the effect on your treatment and appointments. They will work with you to determine the best course of action in each individual situation. There is extended guidance on staying at home if you or someone in your household think you have coronavirus.

Advice for when staying at home

Staying at home will help control the spread of the virus to friends, the wider community, and particularly the most vulnerable. The following may make it easier:

- Plan ahead and think about what you will need in order to be able to stay at home for the full 7 or 14 days.
- Think about and plan how you can get food and other supplies such as medications that you will need during this period.
- Ask friends, family or your employer if they can drop off anything you need.
- If you order supplies online, make sure these are left outside your home for you to collect.
- Keep in touch with friends, family and work colleagues over the phone or through social media.
- Think about things you can do during your time at home. People who have successfully completed a period of staying at home have kept themselves busy with activities such as cooking, reading, online learning and watching films.
- Plan in advance what you will do if someone in your household were to feel much worse, such as have difficulties breathing.
- Find some exercises you can do at home - If you go out to exercise you will need to keep a safe distance (two metres) from other people.
- If you are an employee and unable to work due to coronavirus, please refer to this guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions to find out about the support that is available to you.
- Staying at home for a prolonged period can be difficult, frustrating and lonely for some people and that you or other household members may feel low. It can be particularly challenging if you don't have much space or access to a garden.
- It's important to remember to take care of your mind as well as your body and to get support if you need it. Stay in touch with family and friends over the phone or on social media. There are also sources of support and information that can help, such as the Every Mind Matters website.

Caring for people with cancer

I am a carer to someone with cancer. Should I be doing anything differently?

If you provide essential care (such as help with washing, dressing, or preparing meals), you may find this guidance on Home care provision useful.

I have been exposed to the virus and am a carer for someone with cancer. What should I do? Who will look after the person I care for if I am unable to?

The Government is currently advising that if you have symptoms and you live with a vulnerable person, you should try to find somewhere else for them to stay for 14 days.

If you provide essential care (such as help with washing, dressing, or preparing meals), you may find this guidance on Home care provision useful.

It is also a good idea to think about what happens if you become unwell. If you need help with care but you're not sure who to contact, or if you do not have family or friends who can help, you can contact your local council who should be able to help you. Carers UK have also produced advice for those currently caring for others.