



## Coronavirus: What People with Cancer Should Know

NCI information specialists are available to help answer your questions about coronavirus and cancer Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m. ET.

[Chat Now](#)

### What is coronavirus, or COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are common in people and many different species of animals. SARS-CoV-2 is a novel (new) coronavirus that has caused a pandemic of respiratory disease named [coronavirus disease 2019, which is abbreviated COVID-19](#).

As the situation evolves the [risk assessment will be updated as needed](#).

### If I have cancer, am I at higher risk of getting COVID-19?

Because SARS-CoV-2 is a new virus, anyone who is exposed to it is at risk of becoming infected and developing COVID-19.

Having cancer increases your risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Other factors also increase your risk for severe illness from COVID-19, including older age and [other medical conditions](#), such as:

- chronic kidney disease
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies
- a weakened immune system from an organ transplantation
- obesity
- pregnancy
- sickle cell disease
- [smoking](#)
- type 2 diabetes

Getting a flu vaccine this year is more important than ever because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It is especially important for people with cancer, as they may be at a higher risk for more severe forms of the flu and COVID-19.

## I am a cancer survivor. Am I at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19?

At this time, it is not known whether having a history of cancer increases your risk for severe illness from COVID-19. People who have been treated for cancer in the past may want to discuss their concerns about COVID-19 with their doctors.

## If I have cancer now or had it in the past, should I get a coronavirus vaccine?

In December 2020, the first vaccines to prevent COVID-19 were authorized and recommended by the US Food and Drug Administration, and other vaccines are likely to become available.

People, including [those with underlying medical conditions](#) such as cancer, may get vaccinated if they have no [contraindications](#)—that is, no history of severe allergic reaction (e.g., anaphylaxis) to any component of the vaccine.

Clinical trials have shown that the safety and efficacy of the vaccines are similar in people with underlying medical conditions that put them at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 and in people without those conditions. And vaccines for other infections, like the flu, are safe and recommended for people with cancer.

However, more data are needed on the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines in people with compromised immune systems due to an underlying medical condition or immunosuppressive therapies. It is possible that these individuals may have a weaker response to the vaccine.

People who have received the vaccine should continue to follow all current guidance to protect themselves against COVID-19 exposure.

## What are other ways that I can protect myself?

Until vaccines become widely available, the most effective way to prevent COVID-19 is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes it. According to CDC, the best way to avoid exposure is to limit in-person interactions with other people as much as possible.

CDC also [recommends the following actions](#) to help [people at high risk for developing serious illness from COVID-19](#) stay healthy:

Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; and before and after coming in contact with



### Coronavirus Vaccines and People with Cancer

An infectious diseases expert explains why it's important for people with cancer to get vaccinated.

- others.
- Stay home as much as possible.
- Make sure you have access to several weeks of medication and supplies in case you need to stay home for prolonged periods of time.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces, including doorknobs, light switches, keyboards, countertops, phones, handles, faucets, sinks, and toilets.

If you must interact with others:

- Stay at least 6 feet away from other people.
- Avoid crowded places.
- **Wear a mask**; be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth when removing it; and wash your hands as soon as possible after touching or removing your mask.

NCI provides [tips and resources for the cancer community to prepare for any emergency](#).

## I receive cancer treatment at a medical facility. What should I do about getting treatment?

If you are receiving treatment for cancer, you should follow your health care provider's guidance. Doctors treating patients with cancer may have changed when and how cancer treatment and follow-up visits are carried out.

Some cancer treatments can be safely delayed, whereas others cannot. Some routine follow-up visits may be safely delayed or conducted through [telemedicine](#). If you take oral cancer drugs, you may be able to have prescribed treatments sent directly to you, so you don't have to go to a pharmacy. A hospital or other medical facility may ask you to go to a specific clinic, away from those treating people sick with coronavirus.

The coronavirus situation is still changing, with states and cities making changes in how they are handling quarantine and critical health care, so check with your provider as needed.

## I participate in a clinical trial at a medical facility. What should I do?

If you are in a cancer treatment clinical trial, please call your [clinical trial research team](#) and follow their guidance.

Physicians and scientists at NCI have worked with doctors and health care staff who carry out NCI-sponsored clinical trials across the United

**What You Can do if You are at Higher Risk of Severe Illness from COVID-19**

**Are You at Higher Risk for Severe Illness?**



Based on what we know now, those at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

People of any age with the following :

- Older adults
- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease, or cardiomyopathies
- Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant
- Obesity (body mass index (BMI) of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or higher but < 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>)
- Severe Obesity (BMI ≥ 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup>)
- Sickle cell disease
- Smoking
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus

**Here's What You Can do to Help Protect Yourself**



**Limit contact** with other people as much as possible.



**Wash your hands** often.



**Avoid close contact** (6 feet, which is about two arm lengths) with people who are sick.



**Clean and disinfect** frequently touched surfaces.



**Avoid all cruise travel** and non-essential air travel.

Call your healthcare professional if you are sick. For more information on steps you can take to protect yourself, see CDC's [How to Protect Yourself](#).



[cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus)

Credit: CDC

States and in Canada to implement specific measures within our clinical trials networks to address the current challenges of providing care to patients enrolled in clinical trials. The health of each clinical trial participant is the institute's most important concern, and NCI is flexible about how clinical trial treatments can be completed and when tests and assessments must be done.

about your health  
and what you can do  
to join the fight  
against COVID-19.

The Institutional Review Boards that oversee each protocol to ensure the safety of patients is working with investigators to make changes that will provide flexibility while maintaining patient safety.

More information can be found on [Cancer Clinical Trials during Coronavirus: Information for People with Cancer](#).

## What should I do if I have symptoms of an infection?

If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 or have [symptoms of an infection](#), isolate yourself from others and call your health care provider. You may need to [get tested for coronavirus](#).

## This is a stressful time. How do I cope?

Coping with cancer in the face of the coronavirus can bring up a wide range of feelings you're not used to dealing with. Learn more about feelings you may have and [ways to cope with them](#).

## What if I have additional questions?

NCI's [Cancer Information Service \(CIS\)](#) can help answer questions that you or a loved one may have about COVID-19 or your cancer care.

To reach the CIS:

- Call 1-800-4-CANCER ([1-800-422-6237](tel:1-800-422-6237)) Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET in English or Spanish. After business hours, recorded information is available.
- Online [LiveHelp®](#) chat offers online assistance in English and Spanish Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET.

### Related Resources

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) - CDC](#)

[Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) - NIH](#)

[Combat COVID - HHS](#)

[Coping with Stress - CDC](#)

[Smoking and COVID-19](#)

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