

Advice on Coronavirus (COVID-19) for cancer patients currently on treatment

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new virus. We are still learning how it works. This is an evolving situation and this advice is based on current information.

If you are a cancer patient on treatment, whether chemotherapy or radiotherapy, you should continue to attend for your treatment unless you have been contacted to reschedule.

Some treatment decisions may be changed at this time. These changes are to protect individual patients and achieve best outcomes. Any changes will be made by your Consultant and will be discussed with you. These changes may include:

- Changes to the medication you are given or how often you need to attend
- Change to where you receive your treatment
- Assessments by phone where possible

These changes will be made by your oncology team in your best interest.

If you have been informed that you are a 'close contact' of someone with coronavirus (COVID-19), call the unit first for advice before attending.

If you are concerned about symptoms of coronavirus (**cough, shortness of breath, breathing difficulties or high temperature – over 38°, loss or change to your sense of smell or taste**) or any other symptoms of concern, contact your oncology unit for advice before attending.

You will be contacted by your oncology unit 1-2 days before your appointment, to check if you have any symptoms of coronavirus or have been in contact with anyone with the virus. For planned hospital admissions, it may be necessary to cocoon and be tested for COVID-19 in advance. Your oncology team will tell you what to do if this is required.

You are advised to attend appointments without family members or carers, where possible, to reduce the risk of contracting or spreading the infection.

Avoid arriving early for appointments to minimise time spent in day wards and waiting rooms.

Reduce your risk

Other health conditions can put you at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. This is likely to be the case for certain cancers or cancer treatments. This is why you should take extra care to protect yourself from coronavirus.

To protect yourself and others

- Wash your hands properly and often with soap and water or alcohol hand rub
- Cover your cough with a tissue, dispose of the tissue, wash your hands
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- Avoid close contact with people, keep 1-2 metres between you and others
- Follow national advice on limiting the number of people you come in contact with, either in your own home or outside.
- You should wear a face covering when you meet with anyone indoors and in any situation where it is difficult to maintain social distancing. The law requires everyone to wear a face covering on public transport. For advice see - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html>
- Avoid all crowded places, especially indoors but including parks and public amenities.
- Work from home wherever possible
- Avoid arriving early for appointments to minimise time spent in day wards and waiting rooms
- Avoid contact with anyone who is ill
- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
- Do not share objects that touch your mouth – for example, bottles, cups
- Do not shake hands

Everyone has been asked to **avoid unessential travel overseas** and to distance themselves from one another to slow the spread of the virus. This is called **social distancing**. This means keeping a space of ideally 1-2 metres (6.5 feet) between you and other people. Do not shake hands or make close contact if possible. This applies to you and your family also.

Extra Steps

Cocooning is a term for staying mainly inside one's home and limiting face-to-face contact with others. This is for your personal protection and reduces the chance of you coming into contact with someone who has the virus. For example, it is best to ask friends or family to go grocery shopping for you. If you choose to go shopping, go during the dedicated shopping hours for people who are cocooning – check these with your local supermarket.

[Read more advice on shopping safely during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

Further information on cocooning is available on the [HSE website www.hse.ie/coronavirus](http://www.hse.ie/coronavirus)

Cocooning is recommended for

- Everyone aged 70 and over
- People of any age who are extremely medically vulnerable: those who may be at risk of serious illness because they already have a serious lung disease or their immune system is significantly weakened.

Your oncology team will advise you on whether you need to cocoon or not. You may be asked to start cocooning two weeks before your treatment, to reduce the chances of having coronavirus at the time you are due to start treatment.

Everyone wants you to keep well. So take people up on offers of help. And remind them of the extra steps you need to follow. Share this guide with them to help explain.

It can be difficult for cancer patients living with uncertainty over recent days. For advice see [“Help to cope with coronavirus worry when you’re living with cancer”](#)

Together 4 Cancer Concern can help if you are struggling with the emotional and psychological effects of living with cancer during this very challenging and uncertain time. Contact the service through the Irish Cancer Society’s Support line **Freephone 1800 200 700**.

Community cancer support centres are continuing to provide services to cancer patients and their families. Contact a centre local to you for advice and support.

Stay up to date, check the www.hse.ie - [HSE coronavirus page](http://www.hse.ie/coronavirus)

Last updated 27/10/2020 please see www.hse.ie/coronavirus