

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Information for Cancer Patients on VICC.org

Updated August 27, 2020

The Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center is following the COVID-19 pandemic closely and taking steps to protect our patients and our staff. Please be assured that we are here for you. Answers to the questions below will be updated regularly as we learn more about COVID-19. Visit: <https://www.vumc.org/coronavirus>

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new kind of coronavirus. This virus infects the respiratory system, which includes the airways from the nose through the lungs.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

COVID-19 may cause flu-like symptoms like fever, a new cough, and new shortness of breath. In rare cases, it can lead to severe respiratory problems, kidney failure or death.

How is COVID-19 spread?

The virus usually spreads from close person-to-person contact through respiratory droplets from coughing or sneezing. When these droplets enter someone's eyes, nose or mouth, that person may become infected.

People may develop symptoms up to 14 days **AFTER** being infected with the virus. In other words, even a person without symptoms may be contagious.

Are there treatments for COVID-19?

Currently there is no cure for COVID-19. Treatment is supportive care, meaning treatment of symptoms and complications.

Are cancer patients at higher risks for COVID-19?

Some types of cancer and treatments such as chemotherapy can weaken your immune system and may increase your risk of any infection, including COVID-19. If you are receiving chemotherapy, there will be times in your treatment cycle when you are at increased risk of infection.

Adults and children with serious chronic health conditions, including cancer, are at higher risk of developing more serious complications from contagious illnesses such as COVID-19.

What should cancer patients do to protect themselves from COVID-19?

Follow the preventive tips below and follow any rules for your state and local community.

Stay updated as the guidance changes over time.

- Wash hands **frequently and well** using soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Practice social distancing by:
 - Avoiding all crowds and any place with five or more people in a closed space
 - Avoiding public places (schools, public transportation, church, theaters, etc.)
 - Keeping a distance between yourself and other people
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, sneezing or coughing
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects people frequently touch
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or flexed elbow then throw the tissue in the trash

- Stay home when you are sick
- For COVID-19, only wear a face mask if you have respiratory symptoms or are caring for someone with respiratory symptoms
- If your cancer health care team suggests using a mask due to your cancer, please follow their instruction

Do I need to get a COVID-19 test?

Patients who are having surgery or any other procedure that requires general anesthesia will be tested for COVID-19 infection before their procedure. Some patients will be tested for COVID-19 prior to starting certain therapy regimens and stem cell transplants regimens. Your provider will let you know if you need a test prior to treatment.

Do I need to change my cancer treatment because of COVID-19?

Each patient's cancer diagnosis and treatment needs are unique. Possible exposure to coronavirus also poses a unique risk to each patient. Your cancer doctor will help you weigh the pros and cons of continuing or changing your personal treatment plan.

Please contact your cancer doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your current treatment plan before making any changes. You can send a message through MyHealthatVanderbilt.com or call (615) 936-8422. If you do not have a MyHealthatVanderbilt.com account already, we encourage you to create an account on this website to make communication with your healthcare team easier.

Do I need to cancel my cancer appointments because of COVID-19?

Please talk to your physician about the risks and benefits of continuing chemotherapy in the midst of the pandemic and make assessments according to your medical needs. Visits will be postponed if the timing of the visit is flexible.

If you need to come in for treatment, know we are maximizing the safety of our patients and healthcare staff:

- Valet staff will be wearing masks and changing gloves between patients
 **Valet services are only offered at the Vanderbilt-Ingram Cancer Center entrance on Pierce Avenue.
- Patients and visitors will be screened at all entry points
- If patients coming to VICC locations have a positive COVID verbal screen, they will be assessed onsite and tested
- Chairs in waiting areas are spread out as per social distancing practices
- All staff are using thorough cleaning and infection control practices
- We are expanding options for telehealth visits through My Health at Vanderbilt, when it is appropriate for each patient's personal healthcare needs

Please call (615) 936-8422 prior to your appointment if you have respiratory symptoms and you will be triaged from there. If you have symptoms, do **NOT** come to clinic unless instructed by the clinic staff to do so.

If you do not have symptoms, plan to come to your appointments unless we call you to reschedule or to offer a telehealth visit, especially if you are in active cancer treatment.

For now, we are limiting the number of people who come with you to clinic to **ONE** person who does not have symptoms.

How are you keeping me safe?

- **Everyone must wear a mask AT ALL TIMES.** This includes patients, visitors, and our staff.
- We take everyone's temperature and ask questions about symptoms and exposure before anyone comes into our buildings.
- We've limited how many people who can accompany a patient or visit in the hospital.
- Our teams frequently clean and sanitize exam rooms and public areas.
- Waiting area chairs are spaced apart.
- Elevator capacity is restricted.
- Telehealth visits may be an option if you and your doctor agree.

The safety of our patients, visitors, doctors, nurses and other staff remain our highest priority. We continue to have restrictions on the number of visitors who may accompany patients in our hospitals and clinics. It is important that we all remain focused on safety measures. [Please see updated visitor policies here.](#)

What do I do if I'm on a clinical trial?

We are committed to continuing life-changing research through clinical trials while maximizing the safety of our clinical trial patients.

- Now that we are fully open to accrual for all clinical trials, research nurses and clinical coordinators are rotating shifts back to the VUMC campus.
- Walgreens services will be standardized for all studies moving forward.
- Your research team will let you know if certain visits can be changed to Telehealth visits.
- If your study drug is a pill, your research team will let you know if they can ship it to your house.
- It is more important than ever to let your research team know of any symptoms you are experiencing.
- If you have concerns about continuing on your specific trial, please discuss with your cancer doctor or research team.

What should I do if I get respiratory symptoms?

If you have fever, cough or shortness of breath and are concerned about the coronavirus, call one of these numbers to be assessed:

- Vanderbilt patients: (888) 312-0847 (Available daily, 7 a.m.-10 p.m.)
- Non-Vanderbilt patients: (877) 857-2945 (Available daily, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.)

If I get tested for COVID-19 outside of Vanderbilt Health, will Vanderbilt Health automatically get my test results?

No, Vanderbilt Health will not automatically receive results from any COVID-19 test done outside of the Vanderbilt Health system, such as tests provided by health departments or other clinics. If another lab notifies you that you tested positive for COVID-19, please contact your cancer doctor immediately by sending a message through [MyHealthatVanderbilt.com](#) or calling (615) 936-8422.

For more information about COVID-19 for cancer patients, visit these websites:

National Cancer Institute:

<https://www.cancer.gov/contact/emergency-preparedness/coronavirus>

American Cancer Society:

<https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/common-questions-about-the-new-coronavirus-outbreak.html>

LLS launches COVID-19 Patient Financial Aid Program

The Leukemia Lymphoma Society (LLS) has launched a new patient assistance program – The LLS COVID-19 Patient Financial Aid Program – that will provide \$250 to eligible blood cancer patients experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic. This will help patients offset non-medical expenses including rent, mortgage, utilities and food.

Blood cancer patients who apply do not need to have a COVID-19 diagnosis, and they could have already received assistance from other LLS Patient Financial Assistance Programs.

[Learn more and apply here](#). If patients have questions or need assistance applying, they can call (877) 557-2672.