

Advice for cancer patients on cocooning to decrease your risk of getting Coronavirus (COVID-19)

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.

Cocooning is a term for staying 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.

Cocooning is recommended for

- Everyone aged 70 and over
- People of any age who are at very high risk from COVID-19. Further information is available [here](#).

If you are under 70 and have a diagnosis of cancer, it is recommended that you cocoon if the following apply to you:

- You are currently on chemotherapy or immunotherapy or a targeted treatment. This does not include hormone treatments, as they do not affect your immune system. When you complete your chemotherapy, your doctor will advise on how long you need to continue to cocoon.
- You are being treated for a cancer of the blood or lymph glands, such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma. If you are unsure if your type of blood or lymph gland cancer weakens your immune system, check with your cancer team
- You had a bone marrow or stem cell transplant in the past six months, or are waiting for a transplant
- You may also be advised to cocoon for two weeks before starting your treatment or before coming in for surgery or a particular test.

Always discuss with your GP or oncology team if you are unsure if this advice applies to you.

Reducing your risk by cocooning

The most important way to slow the spread of the virus is for everyone to follow the advice to stay at home, keep your distance from other people, if you need to cough do so into a tissue, and wash your hands often and well.

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

If you are advised to cocoon, follow the extra steps below to reduce your chances of coming into contact with someone with coronavirus. If you are living with someone who doesn't need to cocoon, they can help you by following social distancing and hand hygiene advice at home, spending as little time as possible in shared rooms, using separate towels, cleaning crockery and cutlery thoroughly and regularly cleaning frequently touched surfaces.

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

Do

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Avoid touching your face with unclean hands
- ✓ Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- ✓ Avoid close contact with people. Keep 1-2 metres between you and others.
- ✓ Wear face coverings in public places, such as shops and on public transport. 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>
- ✓ Limit your social interactions as much as possible.
- ✓ 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. For advice see - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/face-masks-disposable-gloves.html>
- ✓ Work from home where possible, if you are not able to work from home get advice from your occupational health service and your healthcare team.
- ✓ Keep yourself mobile by getting up and moving as much as possible.
- ✓ Ask neighbours, family or friends to get any shopping or medicine you need. 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](#)
- ✓ Use the phone if you need to contact your GP or other services.
- ✓ Avoid unessential travel; [follow travel advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs](#).

Don't

- ✗ Do not attend gatherings where you can't keep 2 metres apart from other people.
- ✗ Do not socially isolate yourself from friends and family.

What do I do if I am receiving treatment for cancer?

If you are 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
- Treatment break
- Change in treatment location
- Assessments by phone where possible

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

Avoid arriving early for appointments to minimise time spent in the day ward and waiting rooms. If you have been asked to restrict your movements because someone in your house has been diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19), or is suspected of having coronavirus, 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.

In the last 14 days, you have been in contact with someone with coronavirus. You will need to restrict your movements until the 14 days are up. This applies even if you have a COVID-19 test during the 14 days which show no virus.

Where to get support

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. If you need practical assistance while cocooning, contact your local coronavirus support team.

It can be difficult for cancer patients living with uncertainty at the moment. 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](#)

Last updated 11/03/2021 please see www.hse.ie/coronavirus