

Advice for cancer patients on taking extra precautions to decrease your risk of getting 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.

Extra precautions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 are recommended for people of any age who are at very high risk from COVID-19. This is for your personal protection and reduces the chance of you coming into contact with someone who has the virus.

If you have a diagnosis of cancer, and if any of the following apply to you, you are considered at very high risk from COVID-19 and it is recommended that you take extra precautions:

- 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 take extra precautions
- You have lung or head and neck cancer and are having radical surgery or radiotherapy
- You are having certain complex cancer surgery, for example, surgery for lung cancer, head and neck cancer or oesophageal cancer
- You have advanced cancer or cancer that has spread to another part of the body
- 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 take extra precautions for two weeks before starting your treatment or before coming in for surgery or a particular test.

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

Reducing your risk by taking extra precautions

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

If you are advised to take extra precautions, follow the extra steps below to reduce your chances of coming into contact with someone with COVID-19. If you are living with someone who doesn't need to take extra precautions, 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 taking extra precautions is available on the [HSE website](#), including for those who have not yet received a COVID-19 vaccine:

<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/people-at-higher-risk/not-vaccinated>

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.
- ✓ Avail of the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is offered to you, as long as there is no clinical reason why you should not have it. See further information on COVID-19 vaccination below.
- ✓ If you are unvaccinated, do not have visitors to your home except for essential reasons, such as someone who is caring for you.
- ✓ 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>
- ✓ 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 COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- ✓ Use the phone if you need to contact your GP or other services.
- ✓ [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.

✘ Do not have contact with anyone who is unwell, especially if they have symptoms of COVID-19.

✘ Do not use public transport, if possible.

✘ Do not shake hands with other people.

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/haematology team in your best interest.

Avoid arriving early for appointments to minimise time spent in the day unit and waiting rooms. If you have been asked to restrict your movements because someone in your house has been diagnosed with COVID-19, or is suspected of having COVID-19, call the day unit first for advice before attending.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19

If you are concerned about symptoms of COVID-19 (**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, you should [self-isolate](#) (stay in your room) and contact your day unit for advice before attending.

If you are a close contact of COVID-19

If you have been informed that you are a 'close contact' of someone with COVID-19, call the day unit first for advice before attending. You may need to [restrict your movements](#) for 14 days and get tested for COVID-19, depending on your COVID-19 vaccination status and current treatment. A member of the [contact tracing team](#) will advise you on what you need to do when they phone you. Further information for close contacts can be found [here](#).

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 these extra

steps. If you need practical assistance while cocooning, contact your [local COVID-19 support team](#).

It can be difficult for cancer patients living with uncertainty at the moment. For advice see "[Help to cope with COVID-19 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 COVID-19 page](#)

Last updated 30/08/2021 please see www.hse.ie/coronavirus