

Advice on COVID-19 if you have had cancer

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 concerned about symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, shortness of breath, breathing difficulties, high temperature, loss of or change to your sense of taste or smell), you should [self-isolate](#) (stay in your room) and phone your doctor.

There are some groups of people who may be more at risk of serious illness, including cancer patients who are on treatment which weakens their immune system, if they catch COVID-19.

The risk of serious illness also increases with age or if you have a long term health condition, such as heart disease or lung disease.

Reduce your risk

Everyone is being asked to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, following the steps listed below. If you are concerned that you might be at higher risk from COVID-19 due to previous diagnosis of cancer or other medical condition, you should discuss this with your GP. Further information is available on the [HSE website](#) including a list of those considered at 'high' and 'very high' risk from COVID-19: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/people-at-higher-risk/>

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, and wash your hands
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surface
- Avoid close contact with people and keep 2 metres (6.5 feet) between you and others (this is called social distancing)
- 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
- Avoid all crowded places, especially indoors but including parks and public amenities
- 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
- [Follow up to date travel advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs](#)

- Avail of the 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 below).

Where to get support

Everyone wants you to keep well. Take people up on offers of help, and remind them of the steps you need to follow. Share this guide with them to help explain.

It can be difficult for people who are living with cancer or who have had cancer in the past. For advice see "[Help to cope with COVID-19 worry when you're living with cancer](#)"

Together 4 Cancer Concern is a new support service set up by Cancer Care West, the Irish Cancer Society and the National Cancer Control Programme. 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 on **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](#)

COVID-19 vaccination

Rollout of Covid-19 vaccines is well underway in our health service. If you have cancer or are undergoing cancer treatment (including chemotherapy, immunotherapy, hormonal therapy or radiotherapy) you should avail of the vaccine as soon as it is offered to you, as long as there is no clinical reason why you should not have it.

If you have had a stem cell transplant, talk to your healthcare team about the best time for you to have the vaccine.

Up to date information on the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in Ireland is available on the HSE website: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/rollout/> .

Protection against COVID-19 following vaccination

Depending on which vaccine you get, it may take between 7-15 days after the course is completed for the body to be protected from COVID-19. Current evidence suggests that COVID-19 vaccines work for new types of COVID-19, such as the delta variant.

Patients with cancer have an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Cancer or cancer treatments can weaken your ability to fight infection. Getting the COVID-19 vaccine offers you some protection from COVID-19. Many factors can influence how well the vaccine works for you. These include underlying health conditions and their treatments,

such as certain types of cancer and cancer treatments, the timing of the vaccine, how healthy your immune system is and your general level of fitness.

People who are immunocompromised are advised to follow general public health advice and strictly adhere to current government restrictions to protect themselves from getting COVID-19. Specific advice for how to avoid COVID-19 for people most at risk of severe disease is available on the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website at the following link:

<https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/guidance/peopleatincreasedriskofsevereillness/othersatincreasedriskofsevereillness/>

Vaccine bonus

When your vaccine has had time to work, you can do some things that were not recommended before you were vaccinated. This is called a ‘vaccine bonus.’

All fully vaccinated people are entitled to avail of the vaccine bonus. However, people who are immunocompromised are advised to exercise caution. People who are immunocompromised should follow the general public health advice and strictly adhere to current government restrictions to protect themselves from getting COVID-19.

Further information on the vaccine bonus is available on the HSE website at the following link: <https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccine/get-the-vaccine/when-you-have-been-vaccinated/>

Further advice for people at very high risk from COVID-19 on meeting people, particularly for those who have not yet received a COVID-19 vaccine, can be found at: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/people-at-higher-risk/not-vaccinated>

Further information on COVID-19 vaccines including frequently asked questions on COVID 19 Vaccines for adults with a diagnosis of cancer or who are receiving cancer treatment can be found at the following link:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/patient/leaflets/cancer%20patient%20faqs%20on%20covid-19%20vaccination.pdf>

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