COVID-19 and Cancer Treatment
Information for Patients & Families

This information is specific to Alberta cancer patients. Your main source of information on COVID-19 and health is at Alberta.ca and albertahealthservices.ca/COVID. The global COVID-19 pandemic is changing daily. We will update this information as things change.

As a cancer patient, am I more likely to get COVID-19? What if I am a cancer patient who smokes?
At this point, we cannot be sure if cancer patients are more likely to get sick with COVID-19. New evidence and understanding does show that cancer patients and those on treatment may experience COVID-19 more severely. With COVID-19 affecting the lungs, it seems likely that cancer patients who smoke are even more vulnerable to severe COVID-19 symptoms. We recommend you stop smoking. For help with quitting smoking, visit AlbertaQuits.ca. To help keep yourself safe, follow the COVID-19 precautions.

Questions About Symptoms

Chemotherapy
I am on chemotherapy and I have a fever. What should I do?
If you have a temperature of:
- 38.3°C (100.9°F) or higher at any time or
- 38.0°C (100.4°F) to 38.2°C (100.8°F) for at least 1 hour

Follow the directions your cancer centre gave you.
- Call the contact number we gave you. If you can’t get through or it’s after hours, go to your nearest emergency department.
- Give the nurse your emergency letter and tell them that you are on chemotherapy.
**Immunotherapy**

I am on immunotherapy and have developed a cough, shortness of breath or fever. What should I do?

If you have:
- a fever of $38.9^\circ C$ (102$^\circ F$) or higher that lasts longer than 24 hours
- a cough
- difficulty breathing

Follow the directions your cancer centre gave you, and call the contact number they gave you. They will tell you what you need to do next.

**Radiation Treatment**

I am on radiation treatment and have a cough related to treatment. What should I do?

If you are having treatment to the chest or lungs, a cough can be a normal side effect from treatment. Answer the screening questions honestly and let them know you have a cough and are having radiation treatment to the lungs. We will ask you to put on a mask and if you have no other symptoms, you will go to the radiation department for your scheduled treatment. If your cough has changed and is different than before, you should report it as a new symptom.

**Screening for COVID-19 at the Cancer Centres**

Please note: It is very important that you answer all screening questions as honestly and fully as possible. You will still get care you need!

Answering honestly helps us to:
- Provide you with the best possible care for your cancer and any symptoms you may have
- Keep our healthcare teams as healthy as possible so they can continue to provide care

You may receive a screening phone call before your appointment at the cancer centre.

**Arriving at a cancer centre**

What can I expect when I come to the cancer centre?
- Use the hand sanitizer immediately upon entering the building.
- We will ask you screening questions. This will help us limit people’s exposure to COVID-19 within our centres and keep patients and staff as safe as possible. Answering fully allows us to provide you with the most appropriate cancer care.
• There may be line-ups. Please come **5-10 minutes earlier** than you normally do. This will give you time for the screening questions and help you get to your appointment on time.

• Please respect the need to stay 2 meters or 6 feet away from others at screening desks, reception desks and in waiting areas.

**What will happen if I have symptoms when I arrive at the cancer centre?**

• If you have symptoms, **call your cancer centre before you come** so we can assess you by phone first.

• If you do arrive to the cancer centre with symptoms that may be from COVID-19, we will ask you to wash your hands and put on a mask. A healthcare provider will assess you. They will wear personal protective equipment like gloves, gown and mask. After they finish assessing you, they will contact your doctor.

**Visitors**

**Are visitors allowed at the cancer centre?**

To protect cancer patients and staff, and following the direction of Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services, we are limiting visitors in our cancer centres:

**Outpatient and Inpatient Visitor Policies**

**For all Outpatient, First Consult and Treatment Appointments**

You may bring 1 support person if the site is physically able to accommodate this safely.

**For Inpatients at the Cross Cancer Institute**

Each patient may have 1 - 2 pre-approved visitors. Please arrange with the unit and note:

• If the room is large enough for physical distancing to be maintained, both visitors may be permitted at the same time. If not, they must take turns, one at a time.

• Visitors must go straight to the patient’s room. Walking around the centre or going to other areas/units is not allowed.

All visitors will be screened and given a mask to wear when entering the building.

We understand how difficult the visitor limitations are for everyone and encourage you to use technology, like FaceTime and phone calls, to stay in touch with your loved one.

You may want to consider using the [My Care Conversations](#) app available for download for free in the App Store or Google Play. With this app, you can securely audio record conversations with your cancer care team. You can find more information on visitor restrictions from Alberta Health at [Info for Visiting Patients](#).
Questions About Appointments

Clinic Visits (Follow-up and Treatment)
To lower the chances of COVID-19 for our patients and staff and limit the number of people at the cancer centres, your care team is reviewing your care before your appointment and you may be offered a telephone follow-up appointment.

I am worried about getting COVID-19. Do I have to come in for my follow up appointment?
Depending on the reason for your appointment, your healthcare team may offer you a "virtual" visit using the phone, or a video chat. We will only offer this as an option if it is safe to do so. Clinic staff may ask you what technology (phone or computer) you have access to and are comfortable using. Please let them know if you have any concerns. Tips on making the most of your “virtual” visit are found here.

Treatment Appointments (Radiation and Systemic)
Should I still go to my cancer treatment appointment?
Treatment appointments are still scheduled. Please plan to come.
If you do not feel well, call the cancer centre first using the contact number you were given.

What happens if my treatment appointment needs to be cancelled?
If you have COVID-19 or other symptoms that keep you from going to your treatment appointment, your oncologist will talk to you about the next steps.

Screening
Can my cancer centre have me tested for COVID-19?
I have COVID-19 symptoms – please call the cancer centre before coming to any appointments. You will be given directions to follow to arrange for “symptomatic testing.”
I have no symptoms – if you are at the cancer centre for an appointment, have no symptoms but would still like to be tested, speak with your cancer care team.

What do I do? My results are:
Positive for COVID-19 – Speak with someone in Public Health. They will call you with your positive result and give you more information about what to do next.
It is very important that you call your oncologist/cancer care team right away and let them know you are positive for COVID-19.

Negative for COVID-19 – Continue to follow public health recommendations to keep yourself healthy and safe.
Other Frequently Asked Questions

**Bloodwork**

*My lab that I normally go to for bloodwork is closed. Where do I go?*
Labs are working hard to make sure they have enough staff and resources to meet the public’s needs safely. If your local lab is closed, check for more information at DynaLife Medical Labs or Alberta Precision Labs.

*I’m immunocompromised. Is it safe for me to get my bloodwork/MRI/CT/PET?*
Every Alberta Health Services site is doing what they can to keep staff and patients safe. Please see [https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16997.aspx](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16997.aspx) for more information. If you still have concerns, talk to your cancer care team about the impact changing these appointments will have on your care.

**Cancer Medications**

*If I need cancer medications for home, what do I do?*
Call the cancer pharmacy like you normally do. We ask that you call for your refill medication *2 weeks in advance* so there is time to mail your prescription to you. You do not need to come and pick up your medication. If you have a telephone or virtual appointment, your medication will be couriered to you.

**Isolation and Exposure**

*I live with someone who is self-isolating. Do I have to self-isolate as well?*
Follow these [self-isolation](#) guidelines.

*I think I’ve been exposed to COVID-19, but I can’t get through to 811. What should I do?*
AHS has added more staff to answer the increase in calls. We are trying to make sure that there is less of a wait time, so please be patient.

**Classes, Events and Patient Information Pamphlets**

*Are there still classes, support groups and events?*
We are [postponing](#) all classes, support groups and events at our cancer centres until further notice. This is to help limit the amount of people at the centres. Online classes and supports are being added. Classes for Systemic Treatment and Radiation Treatment are available under “In Treatment” at [Information for Patient and Families](#).
Are there print copies of cancer patient information available?
Pamphlet racks are not available at this time due to the public health requirements for physical distancing. There are digital versions of all CancerControl Alberta’s patient information at Information for Patients and Families.

If you require print copies for any reason, please ask your cancer care team.