

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](https://alberta.ca) and ahs.ca/COVID. Read the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information.

As public health restrictions start to ease, AHS and Cancer Care Alberta are moving into pandemic recovery. This transition will take some time. Please try to be patient. We will continue to update information as things change.

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1. Cancer and the COVID-19 Vaccine

Vaccines are a critical way to limit the spread of COVID-19. They are safe and effective. Immunization protects your health, as well as the health of your loved ones and the community.

I am currently having cancer treatment, should I get the COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes, in most cases you should get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible. This applies to people having radiation treatment, surgery, or systemic treatment (chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy/checkpoint inhibitor therapy, or hormone therapy). **There is only 1 exception:**

- People having Stem Cell Transplants (SCT) within the past 4 months — **DO NOT** get the vaccine.

I had cancer treatment in the past. Should I get the vaccine?

Yes, get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you can.

Should my close contacts be vaccinated?

Yes, all your close contacts should be vaccinated against COVID-19 as well.

Who should get a 4th Dose of COVID-19 mRNA Vaccine?

You should get a 4th dose of the vaccine (5 months or more after your last dose) if you are starting or currently on systemic treatment like chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and immunotherapy/checkpoint inhibitor therapy.

If you are a hematology patient, had a stem cell transplant, or you are getting chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy, **ask your hematologist before** you get your 4th dose.

You **do not qualify** for a 4th dose if you are only getting hormone treatment, radiation treatment, or surgery for your cancer.

Call 811 to book your 4th shot or go [online](#).

What happens after I get the vaccine?

Currently, there is not enough evidence on how long the vaccine will protect you and how well it will reduce the spread of COVID-19. While the vaccines being delivered have shown very high effectiveness in clinical trials, no vaccines provide 100% protection.

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After you are vaccinated, please consider continuing to wear a mask indoors. Physical distancing and washing your hands are recommended to prevent illness.
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For more information on the vaccine, visit the [Alberta Health Services COVID-19 Immunization Booking page](#) or the [MyHealth Alberta COVID-19 – What You Need to Know](#).

2. 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.

Immunotherapy (Checkpoint Inhibitors)

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

If you have:

- a fever of 38.9°C (102°F) or higher that lasts longer than 24 hours
- a cough **or**
- difficulty breathing

Follow the directions your cancer centre gave you.

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. Tell the person doing your screening you have a cough and are having radiation treatment to the lungs. They may call someone else on the cancer care team to decide on next steps.

- If your cough has not changed and you have no new symptoms, you will go to the radiation department for your scheduled treatment. Staff at the screening desk may consult with someone from the treatment area before sending you to your appointment.
- If your cough has changed and is different than before, you should report it as a new symptom to the staff at the screening desk. The cancer care team will talk with you about next steps.

Anxiety and Distress

There are resources available to help with anxiety and distress:

- [Getting Help during COVID-19](#)
- [Cancer Care Alberta Supportive Care and Living Well resources](#)
- [AHS COVID 19 Help in Tough Times](#)

3. Appointments

Clinic Visits (Follow-up and Treatment)

Your cancer care team will review your care before your appointment. You may be offered an in-person or virtual 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 cancer care team may offer you a virtual visit. We will only offer this as an option if it is safe to do so. Cancer care 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.

Treatment Appointments (Radiation and Systemic)

What happens if my treatment appointment needs to be cancelled because I am sick?

If you have COVID-19, or other symptoms that keep you from going to your treatment appointment, a member of your care team will talk to you about the next steps.

4. Screening for COVID-19 at the Cancer Centres

You may receive a screening phone call before your appointment at the cancer centre. Current AHS screening information can be found [here](#).

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

Answering honestly helps us to:

- provide you with the best possible care for your cancer and any symptoms you have
- keep our cancer care teams as healthy as possible so they can continue to provide care
- limit the spread of COVID-19

Arriving at a cancer centre

What can I expect when I come to the cancer centre?

- Use the hand sanitizer as you enter the building.
- We will ask you screening questions. This will help us limit people's exposure to illness and keep patients and staff as safe as possible. Answering fully allows us to provide you with the most appropriate cancer care.
- 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.
- You will be given a medical mask and must wear it until you leave the cancer centre.

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 they can assess you by phone first.
- Every time you come to the cancer centre, a staff member will assess you. If you have symptoms that could be from COVID-19 or other COVID-19 related risks, the person who assesses you will contact a cancer care provider to come and make a safe plan with you.

5. Testing for COVID-19

COVID-19 testing and cancer centres

What do I do now that I have my COVID-19 test result?

My result is:

Positive for COVID-19

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Call your oncologist/cancer care team right away and let
them know you are positive for COVID-19.
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Negative for COVID-19 – Practicing safe distancing and washing your hands often will keep you healthy and safe. You may choose to wear a mask indoors if you like.

6. Family Support and Visitation

Are designated support persons allowed at the cancer centre?

To protect cancer patients and staff, we follow the direction of Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services [on family support and visitation](#). Local restrictions on support persons will depend on what is happening with COVID-19 in the local community and care centre.

Any support person will be screened at the entrance and given a mask to wear until they leave.

Patient-identified designated support persons are allowed. Restrictions on the number of visitors allowed is usually due to space limitations or instances where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

You may want to consider using the [My Care Conversations](#) app. This is available for free download. With this app, you can securely audio record conversations with your cancer care team. This will allow you to share important information with family or friends who may not be present.

You can find more information on family support and visitation [here](#).

7. Other Common Questions

Cancer and COVID-19

As a cancer patient, am I more likely to get COVID-19?

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.

Am I at higher risk if I am a cancer patient who smokes?

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](#).

Isolation and Exposure

I live with someone who is self-isolating but has no symptoms. Do I have to self-isolate as well?

Follow these [self-isolation](#) recommendations.

I think I've been exposed to COVID-19. What should I do?

- Find out more about being a close contact [here](#).

If you still have concerns or need more information, call 811 or your family doctor for advice.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, follow [these directions](#).

Classes, Events and Patient Information Pamphlets

Are classes, support groups, and events being offered in person?

We offer both in-person and online classes and support groups. Find out what is available and how to register by asking your cancer care team or by going to [Classes and Events](#).

Are there print copies of cancer patient information available?

Yes. Print copies of cancer patient information will be given to you by your cancer care team. Pamphlet racks will eventually be fully re-stocked. In the meantime, there are digital versions of all Cancer Care Alberta's patient information at [Information for Patients and Families](#).

