Grady

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) INFORMATION
WHAT PEOPLE WITH CANCER NEED TO KNOW

Are there special precautions that people with cancer should take?

People with cancer, people who are in active cancer treatment, older patients, and people with other serious chronic medical conditions, such as lung disease, diabetes, or heart disease, may be at higher risk for the more severe form of COVID-19. The same rules apply for people with cancer as for those without cancer: Be sure to wash your hands well and wash them frequently. Avoid touching your face and avoid close contact with people who are sick.

People who are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 should avoid non-essential travel during this time of COVID-19 outbreak. Avoiding crowds can also help decrease exposure to the virus.

Be sure to get your flu shot each year to help decrease your risk of influenza. Remember, it's still flu season.

What can I do to avoid getting this coronavirus?

There is not currently a vaccine to prevent COVID-19.

The most important way to protect yourself is to avoid being exposed to COVID-19, whenever possible. Follow guidance on travel restrictions issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the World Health Organization.

Another critical way to protect yourself is to wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, about the amount of time it would take to hum the Happy Birthday song from beginning to end twice. If soap and water is not available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. The best way to clean your hands, though, is through soap and water.

In addition to washing your hands frequently, it's important to:
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and throw the tissue away. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hand
- Avoid large crowds
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Clean frequently touched objects and surfaces with household disinfectant cleaning spray or wipes. This includes doorknobs, counters, toilets, keyboards, tablets, phones, and more

Facemasks are not recommended as a way to prevent COVID-19. However, if you are sick with a respiratory illness, such as influenza or COVID-19, wearing a facemask could prevent the illness from spreading to those around you.

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What is coronavirus 2019?

Coronavirus or COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus first identified in an outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause mild illnesses, such as the common cold, to more severe diseases, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Because the novel coronavirus is related to the SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV), it has been named SARS-CoV-2.

The disease can spread from person to person, through small droplets from the nose or mouth that may spread when a person coughs or sneezes. Another person may catch COVID-19 by breathing in these droplets or by touching a surface that the droplets have landed on and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth. Symptoms from COVID-19 can be mild to severe and can include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Other symptoms may include aches and pains, nasal congestion or runny nose, sore throat, or diarrhea. Some people who are infected may not develop symptoms.

What should I do if I think I may have this coronavirus?

Contact your doctor if you have a fever and other symptoms of a respiratory illness, such as cough and shortness of breath, particularly if either of these 2 conditions applies to you:

1. You have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19.
2. You live in or have recently traveled to an area known to have an outbreak of the disease.

Call ahead before visiting your health care professional or the emergency department and let them know that you think you may have COVID-19. Your health care professional will work with local and state health departments to find out if you should be tested. Staying home when you are sick is the best way to prevent transmitting the novel coronavirus and other respiratory viruses (like the flu) to other people.

If you are on cancer treatment that weakens the immune system and you develop a fever and respiratory symptoms, call your oncologist just like you normally would. Follow their guidance on when to come into the office or hospital and when it's safer to stay home.

Again, be sure to wash your hands often.

Where can I get the latest information about COVID-19?

Staying up to date on the latest information on the COVID-19 outbreak is important. The CDC (www.cdc.gov) and Georgia Department of Community Health (www.dch.georgia.gov) have ongoing information about the disease in our community.

References:
Markham, Merry Jennifer, MD, FACP "Coronavirus 2019: What People with Cancer Need to Know"
https://www.cancer.net/blog/2020-03/coronavirus-2019-what-people-with-cancer-need-know

The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) is aware that people with cancer and cancer survivors, particularly those with compromised immune systems, are likely worried about the potential impact of coronavirus on their health. Patients should talk with their oncologists and health care teams to discuss their options to protect themselves from infection.

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