



COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and Cancer: Information if you are a patient or carer

UPDATED 13 January 2021

This leaflet is for you if you have cancer or you care for someone who has cancer.

COVID-19 is the illness caused by the new coronavirus first identified in China. It can cause a cough, a high temperature (37.8C or greater), and/or loss of sense of smell or taste. (Amended 8th June)

Generally, COVID-19 can cause worse symptoms in people whose immune systems do not work well, older people and people with long term conditions like cancer.



Your cancer treatment may change. This is to keep you safe, because the COVID-19 infection presents a new risk. Your medical team will discuss any changes with you. Some safer options might be delaying treatment or reducing the intensity of treatment.

If you are on treatment for cancer or have received treatment in the past 6 weeks, it is very important to phone for advice if you become unwell.

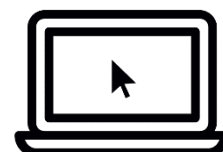


Any cancer patient worried about symptoms should call their existing **cancer treatment helpline or the national Cancer Treatment Helpline on 0800 917 7711.**

For individuals in a high risk group without family or community support or online access, please call 0800 111 4000 to receive support.

- For general information about COVID-19 call 0800 028 2816
- Cancer Research UK call 0808 800 4040 (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
- Macmillan Cancer Support call 0808 808 00 00 (every day, 9am - 5pm)

The [NHS Inform Scotland](#) website has up-to-date information and answers to frequently asked questions.



The Scottish Cancer Coalition, a group of charities who support those with cancer, are providing a range of support services from mental wellbeing to financial and welfare advice. You can find a summary of their services on their [webpage](#) (scottishcancercoalition.org.uk).





What should I know about Coronavirus (COVID-19) and cancer treatment? (Amended 8th July)

If you are receiving treatment for cancer, it is important that you take extra care of your overall wellbeing, and continuing to attend hospital appointments may be part of this.

Your clinical team will try to minimise the time you spend in hospital departments, for example arranging telephone or Near Me video consultations and offering blood tests at a different NHS site. Make sure your care provider has your up-to-date contact details.

Your specialist or one of their team may contact you to change your appointment. If you have not been contacted, **please assume that the appointment is to go ahead as arranged.**

If you have the symptoms of a possible Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection then do not come to the hospital. Instead you should check your symptoms against the information on [NHS Inform](#) and call the National Cancer Helpline for further advice (0800 917 7711). Please also inform your clinical team.

Information about visiting loved ones in hospital can be found [here](#).

If hospital admission is likely please remember to pack your mobile phone and phone charger so you can keep in touch with relatives and friends.

As lockdown is lifted, should I assume my treatment will return to normal? (Amended 13th January)

As lockdown restrictions are eased in Scotland, it does not mean that the virus is completely gone. The virus will stay with us for some time to come, and the risk associated with it will relate to the number of cases in Scotland.

As the risk reduces, a number of cancer services will aim to return to full capacity. However, due to the build up of deferred treatments over the course of this pandemic and the new measures in place to reduce the risk of transmission (e.g. more time to clean surgery theatres), the available appointments for services may be oversubscribed.

There may also be a need to attend a different hospital than normal to receive your diagnosis or treatment due to the reduced availability of appointments, physical distancing requirements and to see you as early as possible. It is important you still attend these appointments if you can.

We understand that as an individual receiving services for cancer (screening, diagnostic, or treatments), you will be very anxious to receive these as soon as it is safe to do so. A national group of leading clinicians have established clinical frameworks in order to prioritise on the basis of the severity of an individual's disease. Those with the most critical prognosis will be progressed first into receiving treatment. This will ensure we are helping people in order of most urgent need of treatment.





What if I could receive my treatment from another health board before my own board can offer the service? (Amended 8th June)

The Scottish Government requires each health board across Scotland to use the same framework to prioritise patients receiving treatment. In order for patients to receive treatments as soon as it is possible, in a safe manner, there may be a need for the patient to travel to another board.

Generally, patients who are fit enough to receive a treatment (e.g. surgery) will usually be fit enough for some travel within Scotland. This will help to alleviate the pressure on certain boards and will ensure patients are being seen and receiving the best treatment at the earliest possible time. The vast majority of patients will be treated in their local board or region.

What should I do if I become unwell while on treatment for cancer?

If you are on treatment for cancer, it is very important to phone for advice if you become unwell.

Remember: symptoms can start for reasons other than COVID-19. Any cancer patient worried about symptoms should call their existing **cancer treatment helpline or the national Cancer Treatment Helpline 0800 917 7711**. They will ask a series of questions and will give advice or arrange for you to have a medical review at your nearest hospital.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are a new continuous cough, a fever/high temperature (37.8°C or greater), and/or a loss of sense of smell or taste. (Amended 8th June)

A new continuous cough is where you:

- have a new cough that's lasted for an hour
- have had 3 or more episodes of coughing in 24 hours
- are coughing more than usual

A high temperature is feeling hot to the touch on your chest or back (you don't need to measure your temperature). You may feel warm, cold or shivery. Some people will have more serious symptoms, including difficulty breathing, which might require admission to hospital.

If you have chest pain, significant bleeding or you need immediate medical attention call 999.





I am the parent/ carer of a child with cancer. What should I do if they have a high temperature?

As a parent or carer of a child or young person with cancer, you may be aware that guidance has been issued nationally that people who have cancer and are receiving active chemotherapy and/or have leukaemia or lymphoma, should follow shielding guidance. It is therefore very understandable that you may have experienced worries about bringing your child to hospital in case of exposure to the virus. However, children and young people on chemotherapy are at risk of serious bacterial infection which can be overwhelming. **It is therefore essential that you please do not delay in reporting a temperature to your clinical team and attending for treatment.**

There is a well-established pathway through Accident and Emergency for children with temperatures and all appropriate measures are in place to protect children from exposure to COVID-19. Staff are wearing the correct PPE at the correct time and will be following recent advice to wear face masks at all times.

If you are the parent or carer of a child or young person with cancer you will be particularly anxious about what you should and can do to help and protect them at this time. Alongside the clinical advice provided in this leaflet there is further advice available on the [Parent Club](#) webpage on how to support your child at this difficult time.

What if I have previously been advised to 'shield'? (Amended 13th January)

Some groups of people are considered to be clinically at high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19). If you are in this group you will have received a letter from NHS Scotland or will have been contacted by your doctor. If you are in this group you should follow the same advice as everyone else in your protection level and there is some [additional advice](#) which you can choose to follow. **In addition, if you are impacted by the temporary lockdown of mainland Scotland and not able to work from home, we would advise you not to go into work.** You should receive a letter from the CMO, which will act as a fit note.

These can be found on [NHS Inform](#) and the [Scottish Government's](#) website.

Where can I call for support? (Amended 14 December)

If you have concerns related to cancer or your treatment you should contact your cancer clinical team.

The NHS Inform Scotland website has up-to-date information and answers to frequently asked questions.

www.nhsinform.scot/coronavirus





For general information and any concerns about coronavirus (COVID-19) you can call 0800 028 2816 (COVID-19 helpline).

You should ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services to arrange deliveries of food and medicines where possible if you are not able or advised not to leave your home.

If you are unable to access the food and essentials you need, or if you cannot afford to buy them, please phone the national helpline on 0800 111 4000, or contact via textphone on 0800 111 4114. The helpline is open office hours Monday to Friday and will connect you to your local authority who can help provide support or signpost on to other organisations to help you. Further information on the range of support available can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

If you receive support from health and social care organisations, such as care support through your local authority, this will continue as normal. Your health or social care provider will be asked to take additional precautions to make sure that you're protected.

Cancer Research UK nurses call 0808 800 4040 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Macmillan Cancer Support call 0808 808 00 00 (every day, 9am – 5pm)

For other **non-life threatening** health concerns, your first point of contact should be your GP (in office hours) or 111 (out of hours), in line with the new [right care, right place campaign](#). They will assess you over the telephone or by video link rather than in person to reduce the risk of infection from COVID-19.

Lots of cancer charities are also offering support at this time – please see a list of their services on their [webpage](#).

What should I do to collect my routine medications? (Amended 03 August)

You could ask family, friends and neighbours to support you and use online services.

If you are unable to access the food and essentials you need, or if you cannot afford to buy them, please phone the national helpline on 0800 111 4000, or contact via textphone on 0800 111 4114. The helpline is open office hours Monday to Friday and will connect you to your local authority who can help provide support or signpost on to other organisations to help you. Further information on the range of support available can be found at <https://www.mygov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

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How can I maintain positive mental health?

We understand that the situation you may be facing at the moment due to COVID-19 and your health condition can increase anxiety. In order to ensure you are looking after your mental health there are a few tips you can follow:

- look for ideas for exercises to do at home, the NHS website is a good starting point
- spend time doing things you enjoy – reading, cooking and other indoor hobbies
- try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals and exercise regularly
- try to avoid smoking and alcohol
- try spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air and natural light
- seek support through one of the [Scottish Cancer Coalition](#) charities
- call 111 and select the Mental Health Hub to access mental health advice

Support in dealing with anxiety around impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19) can also be found online at:

- [Clear your Head](#) (Amended 18th June)
- [Breathing Space](#)
- [SAMH](#)
- [Support in Mind Scotland](#)

Tips on how to cope if you are worried about Coronavirus (COVID-19) and in isolation can be found at:

<https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/28084/coronavirus-covid-19/psychosocial-support-and-wellbeing/tips-on-how-to-cope-if-you-are-worried-about-coronavirus-and-in-isolation>

[NHS Inform](#) has further resources to help your mental wellbeing.

Are my carers, and/ or friends and family still allowed to visit me? (Amended 15 Sep)

The current guidance on meeting up with others can be found [here](#).

If you have a carer or visitor who supports you with essential everyday tasks, they can come to your home. We do advise that upon arrival, and often throughout their visit, they wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.

It's also a good idea to speak to your carers about what happens if one of them becomes unwell. In addition, see the [Scottish Cancer Coalition](#) website which lists a range of support offered from a number of cancer charities in Scotland

If you need help with care but you're not sure who to contact, your local council should be able to help you or please visit [Care Information Scotland](#) Online.





How has the advice changed for me if I am not shielding? (Amended 8th July)

It's important to remember that those over the age of 70 without an underlying health condition and under the age of 70 who receive the flu jab for medical reasons are still classed as being at an increased risk from severe illness from COVID-19 and should be particularly careful in following physical distancing measures along with hand washing and cough hygiene.

Further details be found on the [SG webpage](#):

When could I expect to receive the vaccine? (Amended 13th January)

Your local NHS health board or GP will invite you for your coronavirus vaccine soon (or will already have done so) if you are in one of these groups:

- residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
- people aged 80 and over
- frontline health and social care workers

After these groups have been invited for their vaccine, further groups at higher risk from coronavirus will be invited. You will be offered an appointment as soon as it's possible for you to get the vaccine. To find out more visit www.nhsinform.scot/covid19vaccine or call the Scottish COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline on 0800 030 8013 (open daily, 8am to 8pm).

