

Last updated: April 20, 2020

# COVID-19 Testing for People with Cancer

## **Information for patients at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre and their families**

Read this brochure to learn:

- Why you are being tested for COVID-19
- When you will be tested for COVID-19
- If your treatment plan will change if you have COVID-19
- Where you will get tested for COVID-19
- What can you expect during a COVID-19 test
- How you can protect yourself from COVID-19



Patient Education



## How is COVID-19 impacting care at Princess Margaret?

COVID-19 is a new illness. Very little is known about how cancer treatment affects your body's ability to protect you or recover from COVID-19 infection.

Some care at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre is being delayed or changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A decision to delay or change treatment is based on what is most safe for the patient. You and your doctor will decide what the safest care plan is for you.

If you and your doctor decide to go ahead with treatment, you will be tested for COVID-19 before your treatment starts. You will be tested even if you do not have any symptoms. Even people who do not have symptoms of COVID-19 may have the disease and spread it to others.

## Why am I being tested for COVID-19?

There are two main reasons why you will be tested for COVID-19 before you start treatment.

- 1. To protect you and keep you safe.** Cancer treatments weaken the immune system. People who have a weakened immune system have the highest risk of getting very sick if they get COVID-19.
- 2. To protect our staff and other cancer patients.** It is not known if people who have no symptoms of COVID-19 can spread it to our staff and other patients so we are taking precautionary measures. Testing is important so we can take extra precautions if needed.

## When will I be tested for COVID-19?

- You need to be tested for COVID-19 a few days before your treatment visit. We will contact you soon to tell you about the details of your COVID-19 test appointment.

- Test results take between 24 to 48 hours to get back.
- As soon as we have your test result we will call you to discuss the next steps in your care.

## **Where will I have my COVID-19 test?**

You will get tested for COVID-19 at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. It is important that you get tested at Princess Margaret because:

- We get the results of COVID-19 tests much faster than community assessment centres.
- The results of your test will be in your Princess Margaret patient chart (file).
- The COVID-19 test that we use at Princess Margaret is one of the most sensitive tests available.

Since many patients at community test centres have symptoms of COVID-19, you could increase your risk of exposure while being there. Getting your test done at Princess Margaret can limit your exposure to COVID-19.

Once you have been tested for COVID-19 at Princess Margaret, you may not be tested again before your treatment starts. Therefore you must take extra care to protect yourself from being exposed to COVID-19 to ensure that you are as healthy as possible to begin treatment. You must also notify your healthcare team if you develop any new or worsening symptoms (fever, shortness of breath, cough, runny nose etc.).

## **What can I expect during my COVID-19 test?**

- To test for COVID-19, a health care provider will do a swab deep inside your nose, throat, or both areas.
- They may ask you to blow your nose, then to tilt your head back.

- A long, flexible swab will be inserted deeply into your nose, all the way back to your upper throat (nasopharynx).
- Depending on the type of swab used, they may also swab the back of your mouth.
- They will swab the area for a few seconds, then remove the swab.
- Most people find this to be quite uncomfortable, but not painful.

## **Will my treatment plan change if I have COVID-19?**

Many patients have been asking if their treatment will change if they have COVID-19. You will still have cancer treatment if your test shows you have COVID-19.

We may need to change your care plan to make the treatments safer for you, your health care team, and other cancer patients at Princess Margaret. Your health care team will explain the changes to you before starting treatment.

## **How can I protect myself for COVID-19?**

### **Practice physical distancing**

All Canadians are being asked to practice physical distancing. This means keeping people physically apart to prevent COVID-19 from spreading.

Some examples of physical distancing are:

- Avoid gatherings, having visitors in your home and going to public places.
- Avoid public transit if you can. If you must use public transit, sit 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people and follow the good hygiene practices below.

- Avoid leaving your home. If you have to leave your home for any reason (for example, to come to the hospital or to get groceries), wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth. Stay at least 2 metres (6 feet) away from other people.
- Avoid travelling outside Canada, or close contact with people who have in the last 14 days.

## **Practice good hand hygiene**

Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, or use alcohol-based hand gel. Wash your hands:

- before eating or touching your face
- after using the bathroom
- after coughing or sneezing
- after entering your home
- after touching surfaces commonly touched by others (for example, handrails in public spaces)

## **Other precautions**

- Sneeze or cough into your sleeve or use a tissue and throw it away after each use. Then wash your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. You could get COVID-19 if you touch a surface that has the virus on it.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces often. Be sure to clean surfaces that people touch a lot, such as doorknobs, phones, light switches and keyboards.

## **For more information**

If you have questions about COVID-19 testing at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, or changes to your treatment during this time, please ask your care team.

### **Princess Margaret Information Line**

The Princess Margaret Cancer Centre now has a Patient Information Line to answer your questions and direct you to places to get support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Call the Info Line at 416 946 4559 between 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday to Friday, to speak with an Information Specialist.

### **UHN Online Screening Tool**

Everyone entering UHN is being screened for COVID-19. This is to keep our patients, visitors and staff safe.

Patients can speak with the entrance screener OR use the [UHN online screening tool](https://uhnpatientscreen.ca) (<https://uhnpatientscreen.ca>).

No personal information is collected or stored through the screening tool.

Follow 3 easy steps to use the online screening tool:

1. Open your browser on your mobile device and go to the [UHN online screening tool](https://uhnpatientscreen.ca) (<https://uhnpatientscreen.ca>) within 2 hours of your appointment.
2. Click "Begin" and answer the questions honestly.
3. Show the final page to the entrance screener.