

Changes in Cancer Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic

For patients and families

Read this to learn:

- What types of care might be delayed or changed
- Why certain types of care might be delayed or changed
- How the hospital decides whose care is urgent
- What to do if your condition becomes urgent because of a delay in care

This resource contains general information only. Your doctor or clinic will contact you before your scheduled appointment if your care is delayed or changed. You do not need to call the clinic to check on the status of your appointments. If your doctor does not contact you, your care will continue as planned. If you have any concerns about your appointment, please contact your doctor or clinic.

What types of care might be delayed or changed because of COVID-19?

All types of hospital visits may be delayed or changed including:

- appointments
- tests and treatments
- ambulatory care
- stays at the hospital (inpatient units)

Patients whose care is urgent are being treated.

Why are certain types of care being delayed or changed?

Certain types of care are being delayed or changed to reduce the number of people in the hospital. The chances of COVID-19 spreading within the hospital are much lower when fewer people are in the building. UHN is limiting who can enter the hospital to lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 to patients, caregivers and the staff who care for them.

By reducing hospital visits, the hospital can also ensure limited resources are available for patients with urgent care needs.

How does the hospital decide whose care is urgent?

The hospital considers urgent care as care that:

- is needed immediately to prevent death
- prevents a patient's condition from becoming so serious that it can cause life-long medical problems

Care is also urgent if delays would:

- affect a patient's survival
- change a patient's health outcome in a serious way

Ontario Health has developed a guide to help hospitals decide what is considered [urgent care for cancer care](https://www.accc-cancer.org/docs/documents/cancer-program-fundamentals/oh-cco-pandemic-planning-clinical-guideline_final_2020-03-10.pdf?sfvrsn=d2f04347_2) (https://www.accc-cancer.org/docs/documents/cancer-program-fundamentals/oh-cco-pandemic-planning-clinical-guideline_final_2020-03-10.pdf?sfvrsn=d2f04347_2).

How does my health care team decide to make changes to care?

Leadership groups from across the University Health Network (UHN) meet often to discuss any changes in care using the best medical information available.

These Leadership groups work together to discuss how to:

- reduce the risk of infection
- protect patient and staff safety
- manage limited hospital resources in a responsible way
- do the greatest possible good for the greatest amount of people
- maintain the highest quality of care with the amount of resources available

When making decisions or choices, these Leadership groups try to be:

- fair
- transparent (an honest and open process)
- inclusive (include diverse views in making choices)
- accountable (being able to answer why choices are made)

Am I not getting care because of my age?

No. Our decision to delay treatment is based on what is most safe for the patient.

We delay care when the risk of getting seriously sick from COVID-19 is higher than the risk of delaying cancer treatment. Certain risk factors that increase the risk of getting seriously sick from COVID-19 include:

- older age
- people with chronic diseases
- people having cancer treatments
- people who have finished their cancer treatments recently

Your health care team considers these factors when they decide on the best care plan for you.

How often does my health care team review changes to my care?

Your oncologist (cancer doctor) reviews delays or changes to your care often and when your health changes. Speak to your doctor if a decision was made that affects your care or if you need more information. If you still have concerns, phone Patient Relations at 416-340-4907 or email patientrelations@uhn.ca.

How long will the delays go on and where can I get updates about this?

These delays will last until the Government of Ontario tells us it is safe to remove them. Your doctor and health care team will do their best to keep you informed about any delays or changes to your care plan.

Expect our processes to change as we learn more about the virus. Find up-to-date information on [UHN's COVID-19](https://www.uhn.ca/covid19) webpage (<https://www.uhn.ca/covid19>).

Should I go to scheduled tests and treatments?

Do not delay getting your cancer treatment or other care because of COVID-19 fears. If your health care team has told you that you need to get tests or treatments, go to your appointments as scheduled. Delaying treatment can be dangerous if your cancer care team has told you to get it now.

Call your clinic or health care provider before coming to your appointment if:

- you feel unwell with symptoms that could be from COVID-19 (for example chills, fever or new cough)
- you are waiting for results of a COVID-19 test
- you have been in close contact with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19 or someone who has recently travelled outside of Canada
- you have travelled outside of Canada in the past 14 days

What if I feel worried about coming to the hospital for my cancer care?

If you feel worried about coming to the hospital for your cancer care, contact your health care team to talk about your concerns. It is important that your fears about COVID-19 do not stop you from coming to your appointment or for your treatment. In some cases you may be able to do your appointment over the phone.

If you need physical help once you arrive at the hospital for your appointment, let staff know. **Your health care team is here for you.**

What happens to my cancer treatment if I get COVID-19?

If you have cancer, you are at a higher risk of becoming very sick from COVID-19. COVID-19 is a new illness. We don't know how getting cancer treatment affects your body's ability to protect you or recover from a COVID-19 infection.

If test results show you have COVID-19, your doctor will develop a care plan for your condition and health needs. Depending on your situation:

- your cancer treatment may be delayed until you recover from COVID-19.
- your cancer treatment may continue as planned but with extra health checks while you recover from COVID-19.
- you may need to stay in the hospital to recover from COVID-19. You will be isolated (kept apart from other people) to keep others safe from infection.

Your doctor will discuss options for your ongoing care.

Expect our processes to change as we learn more about the COVID-19 virus. Find up-to-date information on [UHN's COVID-19](https://www.uhn.ca/covid19) webpage (<https://www.uhn.ca/covid19>) or call your health care team.

What if my condition becomes urgent because of a delay in my care? What will happen then?

Call your cancer doctor if your cancer symptoms change.

For any emergencies: Call 911 or go to your nearest hospital or urgent care centre.

For more information

If you have questions about 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.