

# What Patients with Cancer Need to Know About COVID-19

## Information for people with cancer and their families

Read this brochure to learn:

- what is COVID-19
- who is at risk
- how to protect yourself and the people around you
- where to find reliable information
- how to manage stress and anxiety about COVID-19

## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus first detected in late 2019. Coronaviruses are a type of virus that can cause the common cold, bronchitis, pneumonia and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).

## How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is still new and experts are studying how it spreads.

Current research shows that COVID-19 spreads through large droplets. A person who has COVID-19 spreads these droplets when they sneeze, cough or speak.

- The droplets can get into the eyes, nose or mouth of people close by (within 2 metres or 6 feet).
- Droplets also land on surfaces. People may touch the surface and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

COVID-19 may also be spread by people who do not have any symptoms (called **asymptomatic spread**). This is why we are now asking everyone at UHN to wear a mask, even if they do not have any symptoms.

## What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include:

- a fever over 38 °C (100.4 °F)
- a new or worsening cough
- shortness of breath, trouble breathing
- sore throat, trouble swallowing
- runny nose or stuffy nose
- joint or muscle pain
- eye pain or pink eye
- headache
- chills
- vomiting or diarrhea, stomach ache

- loss of smell or taste
- severe fatigue

It may be hard to tell if these less common symptoms are caused by COVID-19 or many other common health conditions, like colds, seasonal allergies, or a side effect of your cancer treatment. If you develop any of these symptoms, let your health care team know.

Some people are at a higher risk of developing more serious symptoms or complications because they have health problems that make the illness worse.

## **Who is most at risk?**

People who have a weakened immune system have the highest risk of getting seriously sick. People with weakened immune systems may include:

- older adults
- people with chronic diseases (for example, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, kidney disease or chronic lung disease)
- people having cancer treatments, or who have finished their cancer treatments recently

## **What do I need to know about COVID-19 if I am being treated for cancer?**

Some treatments for cancer, especially chemotherapy and radiation therapy, can weaken the immune system during and after therapy. The immune system can stay weakened for weeks after treatment. You may have a higher risk of having COVID-19 or having more serious symptoms if you get it.

You may be taking medicine as part of your cancer treatment. Ask your health care provider if you need extra medicine in case you need to stay home for a long time. Be sure to have a supply of over-the-counter medicine to treat fever and other symptoms in case you get sick.

See page 7 for the best ways to protect yourself during treatment.

## What is the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre doing to keep me safe?

We have screening processes and other safety measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect patients and staff at UHN. Your health care team will do their best to keep your cancer care plan as it is. They may need to make changes to limit your risk.

Expect policies to change as we learn more about the virus. Find the most up-to-date information at [www.uhn.ca/covid19](http://www.uhn.ca/covid19) or call your health care team.

### Screening at hospital entrances

People are being carefully screened at UHN hospital entrances. Entrance screening staff will:

- Ask you to wash your hands using hand sanitizer. If you are wearing gloves, you will need to remove them to wash your hands. Gloves cannot be properly sanitized and can bring germs into the hospital.
- Hand you a mask and explain how to put it on safely. Always use clean hands when putting on or taking off your mask.
  - If you wear your own mask to the hospital, entrance screening staff will check it to be sure it is effective. Masks cannot have holes, tears or vents.
- Ask you if you have any symptoms or have travelled recently OR ask to see the final page from the UHN online screening tool. There is more information about the UHN online screening tool below.
- Ask you why you are at the hospital today. Please have your appointment card, itinerary or any other documents you were asked to bring by you care team ready to show them, if needed.
- There may be line-ups of patients waiting to speak with screeners when you arrive. Come a few minutes early to be sure you have time to speak with a screener.
- Although you should come a few minutes early, do not come an hour or more early. You will not be allowed into the hospital until it is close to your appointment time.

## UHN Online Screening Tool

Patients can speak with the entrance screener OR use this online screening tool when entering UHN: [uhnpatientscreen.ca](http://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 [uhnpatientscreen.ca](http://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.

## Limiting visitors and caregivers

Visitors are not allowed in the hospital at this time, even to use the washroom. Only patients with appointments and their Essential Care Partners can enter the hospital. Each patient may bring 1 Essential Care Partner if needed for the patient's safety and well-being. Other caregivers, visitors and drivers are not allowed in the hospital.

If someone comes with you to the hospital who has not been pre-approved by your clinic or unit manager, they will not be allowed in and must wait for you outside the hospital. See [this brochure](#) to find information about what to bring with you to your appointments and what is nearby the hospital.

## How to ask for Essential Care Partner approval

Call the unit or clinic manager as early as possible before your visit or appointment. The manager must approve the visit **before** your Essential Care Partner can enter the hospital. To learn more about Essential Care Partners, visit [www.uhn.ca/COVID19](http://www.uhn.ca/COVID19) and click on "[Our No Visitor Policy](#)" or see "[Who Can Enter UHN During the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)"

Note: Essential Care Partners must speak with an entrance screener when they arrive at the hospital entrance.

## Universal Masking Policy

UHN now has a Universal Masking Policy because the virus may spread even from people who do not have any signs of an infection. Anyone coming to the hospital for appointments, treatments, and pre-approved Essential Care Partners, needs to wear a mask while inside the hospital. All staff are also wearing masks.

## Physical distancing

All Canadians are asked to practice physical distancing (keeping at least 2 metres or 6 feet apart from other people) to prevent COVID-19 from spreading. Please do your best to keep 2 metres apart inside the hospital, even when wearing a mask.

Your Essential Care Partner may be asked to wait for you in the hallway or another location. Learn more about what [physical distancing measures are in place](#) on our website.

## What can I do to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Call your clinic before coming to the hospital if you have any of the symptoms of COVID-19.

Tell clinic or booking staff about your symptoms or if you have had close contact with a person who has COVID-19.

Your team will talk about your therapy or treatment and decide:

- if you need to come to the hospital
- if your appointment needs to be rescheduled
- if you can have your appointment through a virtual visit

## Virtual Visits

Your health care team may offer you a virtual visit (sometimes called a **remote appointment**) instead of an in-person visit to help keep you, other patients and staff safe. This will depend on the type of appointment you have. Your team will only offer it if it is safe to do so.

## **What is a virtual visit?**

A virtual visit is when your health care provider uses technology to care for you without you coming to their office. Princess Margaret has been offering virtual visits for years in many areas and most patients are happy with the care they receive in this way.

A virtual visit could use a phone call or a video call. Your health care provider can diagnose problems you may have and create a treatment plan for you. Your phone or video call will not be recorded or saved.

Clinic staff may ask you what technology you have access to, for example a computer, smartphone or tablet, and what technology you are comfortable and willing to use.

Learn more about virtual care, visit [www.uhn.ca/PatientFamilies/Virtual\\_Care](http://www.uhn.ca/PatientFamilies/Virtual_Care).

## **What can I do to protect myself, my family and friends?**

Take precautions to prevent the virus from spreading. Some of the best ways to protect yourself and others include:

### **Practice physical distancing**

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. Wear a mask. Masks are now mandatory on Toronto public transit.
- Avoid leaving 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.
- Always use clean hands when putting on or taking off your mask. Stay at least 2 metres away from other people.
- Avoid travelling outside of your local area unless it is necessary.

### **Practice good hand hygiene**

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wash your hands:
  - when you are near or touch other people
  - before eating or touching your face
  - after using the bathroom
  - after coughing or sneezing
  - when entering your home
- 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.

## **Wear a mask or face covering**

- Wear a mask or face covering to protect others in case you are infected, even if you are not showing signs of being sick. Your mask or face covering can be a reusable, cloth face covering or a disposable mask.
- Make sure the mask covers both your nose and mouth and fits snugly. Always use clean hands when putting on or taking off your mask.
  - If you are coming to Princess Margaret and do not have a mask, we will provide you with one at the entrance. For more details on what masks are acceptable to wear while at UHN, visit [www.uhn.ca/covid19](http://www.uhn.ca/covid19).

## **Keep away from people who are sick or have travelled recently**

- Avoid people who are sick.
- Avoid people who have travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days.

Self-isolate if you have symptoms or have travelled recently.

- Stay home if you are sick and call your health care provider.
- Self-isolate if you travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days.

**Self-isolate** means to stay at home and monitor yourself for symptoms for 14 days.

Taking all the steps to protect yourself and others helps keep everyone safe, but they are especially important for you as you may have an increased risk due to your cancer or cancer treatment.

## What should I do if I think I have COVID-19?

If you are worried that you may have COVID-19, you can:

- self-isolate from other people as soon as you notice symptoms
- use this online assessment tool: <https://www.covid19toronto.ca/>
- contact your primary care provider, your [local public health unit](#) or call Telehealth Ontario (1 866 797 0000).

**If you are having trouble breathing or experiencing other serious symptoms, call 911 right away.** Tell them about your symptoms, travel history, and that you have cancer.

## For family members and caregivers

If you are a family member or caregiver who lives with or takes care of someone with cancer, all of your actions will affect your loved one's health. If you or another member of your household become infected with COVID-19, you risk infecting the person with cancer as well.

To reduce the risk of becoming infected, follow the same precautions as the person with cancer:

- practice physical distancing
- practice good hand hygiene
- wear a mask or face covering
- keep away from people who are sick or have travelled recently
- self-isolate right away if you have any symptoms of COVID-19

See pages 2 and 3 for a list of symptoms of COVID-19.

## **How can I manage stress and anxiety about COVID-19?**

It is normal to feel stress and anxiety related to COVID-19. Knowing this and paying attention to your mental health is important.

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones
- changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- worsening of chronic health problems
- increased use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs

Taking care of yourself, your friends and your family can help you cope with stress.

### **Things you can do to support yourself**

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic often can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Make time to relax. Do things you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling. Stay connected with trusted family and friends who live away from you using your cell phone, tablet or laptop.

Call the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre Psychosocial Oncology main line if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row: 416 946 4525.

## Where can I find more information?

Information about COVID-19 is changing quickly. For the most up-to-date information:

- call Telehealth Ontario: 1 866 797 000
- call Toronto Public Health Helpline: 416 338 7600 or 311 after hours
- visit the UHN COVID-19 webpage: <https://www.uhn.ca/covid19>
- visit the Ontario COVID-19 webpage: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca>
- follow UHN Twitter accounts (@UHN; @UHNPatientExp; @ipacuhn; @myUHNPortal)

## 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.

## Access your health record online

Access your health record online through myUHN Patient Portal, a secure website for UHN patients.

With myUHN, you can access your UHN appointments, lab results, clinic notes and reports as soon as they become available from your computer, smartphone or tablet.

For more information or to get your registration code, contact myUHN Support at:

- 416 340 3777
- [myUHN@uhn.ca](mailto:myUHN@uhn.ca)

Learn more at [www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/myUHN](http://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/myUHN)