

Cancer treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic

March 30 2020, by Susanne Arnold and Fred Ueland



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For patients currently undergoing treatment for cancer, the possibility of contracting the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is particularly scary. Some of the treatments and medications used to fight cancer can leave patients with weakened immune systems, which puts them at a higher risk for developing serious health problems if they contract the virus.

Nationwide, people are being asked to stay home as much as possible to help prevent and slow down the spread of COVID-19. However, appointments for [cancer treatment](#) are important, and we understand that many patients will still need to come in to [medical facilities](#) to continue their treatments as scheduled.

The University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center, like other medical centers across the country, is working diligently to clean and sanitize facilities to help keep our patients safe. While we continue to maintain our stringent standards of cleanliness in patient care areas, we now have new rules in place to limit the number of people entering our facilities and have increased cleaning in lobby and general public areas.

For everyone who must be out in public, we strongly recommend these preventative measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses:

- Avoid large crowds and social gatherings, and avoid unnecessary personal contact, such as shaking hands.
- Wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; if soap and water is not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face, especially with unwashed hands.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Used tissues should be thrown immediately into the trash.
- If you feel sick, stay away from others. If you have a fever more than 100 degrees and a cough, or if you have known exposure to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, please call your primary healthcare provider.

If you're a patient undergoing treatment for cancer, there are extra precautions you can do to protect yourself and others, including:

- Stay home as much as you can. If you do need to go out, avoid crowds and keep your distance from others.
- Ensure that you have several weeks' worth of your necessary medications at home, or that you have access to receive more if needed. Many pharmacies can mail most prescriptions directly to you, including UK Retail Pharmacies.
- If you're not sure whether you should see your oncologist for an appointment or postpone it, call your provider and determine whether the appointment is necessary or if it can be done over the computer or phone.
- If you have received a [bone marrow transplant](#) or are in active therapy, talk to your oncologist about whether you should wear a mask while out in public.

As a reminder, the most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. If you are undergoing treatment for cancer and begin experiencing these symptoms, call your primary healthcare provider immediately. They will help you determine whether you should remain at home and self-isolate or if you need to come into a medical facility.

For more specific information about COVID-19 for [cancer patients](#), visit our online FAQ at ukhealthcare.uky.edu/markey-covid-19. For more information on the novel [coronavirus](#) and UK HealthCare's response, please visit [Questions and Answers about COVID-19](#).

Provided by University of Kentucky

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