

# New study describes which cancer patients are more vulnerable to COVID-19

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A newly published study led by the Universities of Oxford and Birmingham has found that, compared to other cancers, patients with blood cancers are more vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. As access to treatment remains of upmost importance, this information will help clinicians to guide patients to ensure they can have

therapy safely and successfully during this time.

The study, published in *Lancet Oncology* by the UK Coronavirus Cancer Monitoring Project (UKCCMP), found that [blood cancer patients](#) were particularly at risk with 57% higher odds of severe disease if they contract COVID-19. This was when compared to other [cancer](#) patients, such as [breast cancer](#), which was shown to have the lowest risk overall.

In line with what we already know about the [coronavirus](#) pandemic, age was shown to play a factor in the overall outcome, with cancer patients over the age of 80 found to have the highest frequency of fatality.

As COVID-19 spread globally in early 2020, cancer patients were identified as a sub-group who were potentially at an increased risk of infection of COVID-19 and of potentially suffering more serious disease consequences. It was this concern that led to the formation of the national UKCCMP project.

As cancer treatments need to carry on during the pandemic, this study gives clinicians and patients important information to make informed decisions about that treatment. The production of risk tables for different cancer types will let doctors discuss the risks and benefits with patients, so that together they can pick the best way to treat each person's cancer. The study also gives an evidence base from which hospitals and other healthcare providers can design measures to ensure that they maintain access to life-saving treatments as safely as possible.

Since March more than 60 cancer centers across the UK have entered data into the UKCCMP database with information on adult cancer patients who contracted COVID-19. The project was set up to help researchers and clinicians better understand what groups of cancer patients are most at risk of severe COVID-19.

Using demographic data such as age, gender and tumor type, researchers were able to determine that patients with hematological cancers, particularly older patients and those with leukemia, had a more severe COVID-19 trajectory compared to patients with solid organ tumors.

Professor Rachel Kerr, study Senior Researcher, University of Oxford said: "Using these new data we are working fast to identify trends and correlations, which will enable us to create a tiered risk assessment tool so we can more precisely define the risk to a given cancer patient and move away from a blanket vulnerable policy for all cancer patients, in the event of a second wave of COVID-19."

Dr. Lennard Lee, academic clinical lecturer, University of Oxford said: "For the first time, we have a comprehensive analysis to determine who is more at risk of COVID-19. It is important to note that whilst cancer patients are more vulnerable, the chance of any given patient getting infected with COVID-19 remains low. People with cancer can be reassured that everything is being done in UK cancer centers to effectively minimize the risk of infection so that life-saving treatments can continue to be given."

Professor Jean-Baptiste Cazier, director of the Center for Computational Biology, University of Birmingham said: "This study demonstrates the power of considering patients in the specificity of their condition. We have been able to disentangle the key factors relevant to their situation by integrating detailed information from cancer patients with COVID-19 from across the UK. In turn we are able to help oncologists better inform their patients about their particular risks."

Professor Gary Middleton, University of Birmingham and chair of the UK Coronavirus Cancer Monitoring Project, said: "Patients are turning to their oncologists and wanting to know exactly what is their risk from COVID-19. This is particularly important as the number of cases in

Europe and the UK is still labile. The UKCCMP will continue to work to understand the effect of COVID-19 on [cancer patients](#) and cancer services to ensure the best possible care in the months ahead."

**More information:** Lennard Y W Lee et al. COVID-19 prevalence and mortality in patients with cancer and the effect of primary tumor subtype and patient demographics: a prospective cohort study, *The Lancet Oncology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/S1470-2045\(20\)30442-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1470-2045(20)30442-3)

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