

Q&A: Lung cancer care during the COVID-19 pandemic

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DEAR MAYO CLINIC: My father has been a heavy smoker for most of his life. He was diagnosed with lung cancer recently. He underwent surgery and several chemotherapy treatments prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. He is getting a bit agitated being home, and we are wondering if it is safe for him to venture out now that things are starting to open up?

ANSWER: SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a new virus that we are still learning about. While there is a lot we do not understand, we do know that the virus has severely affected those who are diagnosed with [lung cancer](#), as well as patients who have a long history of smoking. Additionally, patients like your father, who despite having completed [initial treatment](#), would still be considered to have a compromised [immune system](#), should follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines for those considered to be at high risk for COVID-19.

For your father, it is important for him to understand the reason for the strict quarantine and protect himself to limit exposure to COVID-19. Unfortunately, we know that patients who get infected with COVID-19 while they're immunocompromised have a higher risk of serious illness and even death.

Understandably, it can be difficult for patients who are doing well, independent and social, to be told to refrain from going out in public. But explain to your father that it is for his own safety to ensure he remains healthy. I would recommend continuing to limit visits and if he must be around other people, maintain a minimum distance of 6 feet. Have him wear a mask where appropriate and make sure that others also use a face covering. As a provider taking care of patients, I've seen many of my patients putting themselves at risk while trying to help care for their families. While good intentioned, you do have to realize that protecting him also is protecting your extended family.

If your father has additional tests or treatment scheduled, he should feel confident to visit his [health care provider](#) and continue with his treatment regime. Mayo Clinic has taken several steps to ensure the safety of patients and our staff. When patients arrive, they are carefully screened to make sure that they do not have signs or symptoms of COVID-19 infection. Patients and their families are not together as

much as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic, and this also is echoed while they come into the hospital to protect other patients and families. Providers and [patients](#) are all wearing masks, as currently recommended. If your father begins to experience breathing issues or any other symptoms, he should seek immediate medical attention, since it might not be clear if it is COVID-19 or related to his diagnosis of lung cancer.

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