

# Children with cancer at no greater risk of severe COVID-19 infection, research shows

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Pediatric cancer patients who test positive for COVID-19 do not appear to be at any increased risk of severe COVID-19 infection compared with healthy children, a new study shows.

Researchers—including academics from the University of York—analyzed the severity of COVID-19 infection in children with cancer.

The results from the U.K. Pediatric Coronavirus Cancer Monitoring project—set up in April—found that the majority of patients either had mild infections or were asymptomatic. No patients died from COVID-19 and only five percent required intensive care support.

## **Knowledge**

The research was designed in cooperation with the Children's Cancer and Leukemia Group (CCLG) and the project enabled all centers in the UK that look after children with cancer to enroll into the study, which included Leeds Children's Hospital.

Dr. Bob Phillips from the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination said: "Being involved with the study allowed the clinical team to be at the cutting edge of knowledge about how the SARS-CoV2 virus was affecting children and young people being treated for cancer. We could immediately use this knowledge to send clear messages to our patients and the families at Leeds Children's Hospital and nationally via a well established network of children's cancer doctors.

"This supported giving clear, increasingly reassuring messages, and encouragement to carry on giving children with cancer the full intensity of treatment which we know gives the best chance of cure."

## **Illness**

Data was collected on all children with cancer in the UK who on admission to hospital tested positive for COVID-19 so that the severity

of their illness could be collected nationally.

The data was shared with clinicians and the CCLG in [real-time](#) to inform advice on shielding in this group of patients. As a result, the CCLG was able to amend the shielding advice to remove the majority of children with cancer from the group needing to shield.

Lead author, Gerard Millen, Cancer Research UK clinical trials fellow in the University of Birmingham's Cancer Research UK Clinical Trials Unit, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly in the early part of 2020 and there were initial concerns about the severity of the infection in adults with cancer. Whilst children overall seemed to be less severely affected, little was known about the effects in children with cancer.

"The results are reassuring to parents around the country that children with cancer are at no greater risk of developing serious symptoms of COVID-19 than other children."

Senior author Professor Pam Kearns, pediatric oncologist and director of the University of Birmingham Institute of Cancer and Genomic Sciences said: "This project has been critical in allowing clinicians to analyze [real-time data](#) and provide evidence to reassure families of vulnerable [children](#) and [young people](#) with [cancer](#) that they are not at increased risk of severe COVID-19 infection."

**More information:** Gerard C. Millen et al. Severity of COVID-19 in children with cancer: Report from the United Kingdom Paediatric Coronavirus Cancer Monitoring Project, *British Journal of Cancer* (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/s41416-020-01181-0](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41416-020-01181-0)

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