



CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)



Guidance for
CANCER PATIENTS

For more info. on coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)
Call: 16000, or visit: www.moph.gov.qa



Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for the people of Qatar who are currently undergoing treatment for cancer or who have been treated for cancer in the past 10 years.

What is Coronavirus disease (Covid-19)?

COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease with symptoms including fever, cough and shortness of breath.

How do people get infected?

Coronavirus is transmitted, like any other viruses that attacks the respiratory system, from one infected person to another in the droplets when they sneeze, cough or speak especially if at a distance of less than one or two meters. It can also be transmitted through close contact with the infected person or touching surfaces.

Are past and present cancer patients at higher risk?

Cancer patients are among those at higher risk of serious illness from an infection because their immune systems are often weakened by cancer and its treatments. Particularly patients who are in active chemotherapy and bone marrow transplant patients should try to limit the risks of exposure to any virus.

While most people who were treated for cancer in the past (especially if it was several years ago) are likely to have normal immune function, but it is best to be extra cautious. It's important that all cancer patients and survivors, whether currently in treatment or not, talk with a doctor who understands their situation and medical history.

How can people with cancer strengthen their immune system?

- Don't smoke
- Remain hydrated; drink plenty of water
- Have a balanced diet, high in fruits and vegetables (or as indicated by your healthcare professionals) and eat less processed meat, less red meat, and fewer sweets
- Although there is not yet a vaccine for coronavirus, people with cancer should stay up to date on their vaccinations such as those for pneumonia and flu
- Control other health conditions, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes;
- Get adequate sleep
- Maintain regular exercise even if you are staying at home and maintain a healthy weight, as advised by your healthcare provider
- Avoid unnecessary stress, stress can weaken the immune system

What protective measures should people living with cancer take?

- Follow the instructions of MoPH by practicing physical distancing, staying home, avoiding crowds, parks and refraining from touching one another or surfaces
- Take steps to avoid infection, such as washing your hands frequently and cooking meats thoroughly
- Always use a face mask and protective gloves when visiting public areas (i.e. grocery shopping or attending an appointment), at work and even at home when there is a family gathering
- Personal hygiene is extremely important for cancer patients at this time of the virus outbreak. Wash your hands with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcoholic-based solution (60%) or a sanitizer
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth (or ensure you wash your hands before and after)
- Clean surfaces touched often like doorknobs, handles, steering wheels, or light switches with a disinfectant to remove the virus
- Ensure you take your medications as prescribed by your doctor
- Prepare a list of your medications and the dosages
- Get adequate refills for medications, sufficient for at least two weeks
- If you are on chemotherapy, speak with your doctor about continuing with the treatment;
- Have the contact information of your health care provider at hand so that you do not need to leave the house, if you become ill.

What should people living with cancer do if they get the virus?

- If you are showing symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, fever or shortness of breath you may need assessment by healthcare professional. Start self-quarantine, avoid any contact with others and call the national **COVID-19 hotline on 16000**;
- Practice the "Sick day rules" for people with cancer:
 - o Check your blood pressure more often
 - o Reduce sodium (salt) and fat (that leads to higher cholesterol) in your diet
 - o Do not stop your cancer medication unless directed by your doctor;
 - o Rest and postpone exercise
- Monitor temperature, when needed use acetaminophen (paracetamol/ Panadol) rather than anti-inflammatory (ibuprofen/ Advil);
- Always follow healthcare professional team recommendations.

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