

31 March 2020

## A companion resource to the new Clinical Guidance for Haematology and Oncology on COVID-19

As a person living with cancer, you and your whānau/family and carers will likely be concerned about the risks surrounding the novel coronavirus and the associated illness, COVID-19 (*read more about COVID-19*).

The purpose of this information sheet is to summarise for patients with cancer a list of messages about COVID-19 recently published as clinical guidance in *“Managing haematology and oncology patients during the COVID-19 pandemic: Interim consensus guidance”* (Medical Journal of Australia, 20 March 2020). The guidance provides advice for clinicians and their healthcare teams to help their patients and support initiatives to contain, delay and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Please note that the information regarding the COVID-19 situation may change frequently. You can remain up-to-date with information and advice on the **Ministry of Health COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) website**. The guidance will be updated regularly over the coming weeks and months.

The new clinical guidelines on COVID-19 were written by a group of senior specialists from Australia and New Zealand – including haematologists, oncologists and infectious disease physicians – and have been endorsed by multiple organisations.

If you are concerned, have questions or cannot access the internet, please call the Cancer Society of New Zealand helpline on **0800 226 237**, the Leukaemia & Blood Cancer NZ helpline on **0800 15 10 15** or call your cancer care team.

### The Australasian Leukaemia and Lymphoma Group

Since 1973, our purpose has and continues to be ‘Better treatments...Better lives’. The Australasian Leukaemia and Lymphoma Group (ALLG) is committed to improving the treatment, lives and survival rates of patients with blood cancer.

# Key points regarding COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) for patients with cancer

Please note that your doctor or cancer centre/clinic may provide you with information about COVID-19, which is more specific to your cancer or treatment, or which is specific for your cancer centre/clinic – this information should take priority over the general advice here.

Any person is at possible risk of infection with the novel coronavirus. As a person living with cancer, you may be at higher risk of infection with COVID-19. This could be due to the cancer itself and/or the treatment that you are receiving.

Preventing the spread of infection is a high priority for you, your whānau and anyone in close contact with you, including carers and friends. This virus spreads very easily from person to person. It is important to follow the key steps to avoid spread of infection: hand hygiene, avoid touching your face, social distancing and coughing or sneezing into your elbow. See Ministry of Health guidance.

If you are a smoker, you should stop smoking.

No vaccine for COVID-19 is available, but your doctor may recommend that you receive a vaccination against influenza (and against other infections). Depending on your situation, your doctor may recommend additional measures to help reduce your risk of other infections.

COVID-19 can cause fevers, a dry cough, and difficulty breathing. However, these symptoms can be caused by other conditions, including other infections, and can be side effects of some cancer treatments. If you are being assessed for possible COVID-19 disease, let the doctor or nurse know about your cancer diagnosis and its treatment.

If you have symptoms that resemble those of COVID-19, or if you have had recent contact with a person with COVID-19, please do not arrive unannounced at your cancer centre or clinic, as you could put other patients at risk. In this situation, you should first contact your doctor (or cancer centre/clinic) for guidance, or call Healthline on 0800 358 5453.

If you are seeing or speaking with a doctor or nurse (in person or via phone/internet) who is not familiar with your medical history, you should tell them about your cancer diagnosis and any current or recent treatments. It may be helpful for you to carry a copy of a recent letter from your clinic that describes your diagnosis and treatments.

If you experience difficulty obtaining medicines due to increased demand or supply issues, contact your doctor or cancer centre/clinic; they may be able to suggest alternatives.

Please note that travel restrictions are changing rapidly and may be restricted completely in some areas. Before considering domestic or overseas travel, check governmental advice, speak with your clinician, and ensure you have enough medication for your journey and any required periods. Check the restrictions of any travel or medical insurance policies carefully.

If you are feeling concerned or distressed, please seek assistance from one or more of the resources provided on the next page. You can free call or free text 1737.

Additionally, your cancer centre/clinic may direct you to patient information resources tailored to a particular type of cancer.

## References

Weinkove R, McQuilten Z, Blyth E, Cheng AC, Conyers R, Crane M, Haeusler G, Jackson C, Lane S, Mollee P, Mulligan S, Ritchie D, Ruka M, Solomon B, Szer J, Thursky K, Wood K, Worth L, Yong M, Slavin M, The B. Managing haematology and oncology patients during the COVID-19 pandemic: Interim consensus guidance. *Medical Journal of Australia*: 20 March 2020; accessed on 23 March 2020.

## Organisations that endorse the interim guidance

- Australasian Leukaemia & Lymphoma Group (ALLG)
- Australasian Lung Cancer Trials Group
- Australian and New Zealand Children's Haematology/Oncology Group
- Australia and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine
- Bone Marrow Transplantation Society of Australia and New Zealand
- Cancer Council Australia
- Cancer Nurses Society of Australia
- Cancer Society of New Zealand
- Clinical Oncology Society of Australia
- Haematology Society of Australia and New Zealand
- National Centre for Infections in Cancer
- New Zealand Cancer Control Agency
- New Zealand Society for Oncology
- Palliative Care Australia

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# List of Helpful Sites Regarding COVID-19



## NEW ZEALAND

### New Zealand Government, Ministry of Health

- Coronavirus Information available on <https://covid19.govt.nz>
- For COVID-19 Health Advice and Information, contact the Healthline team (free call) on **0800 358 5453** or **+64 9 358 5453** (for international SIMS)

### For Patients

- Cancer Society of New Zealand on <https://cancernz.org.nz> and helpline **0800 226 237** or [info@cancersoc.org.nz](mailto:info@cancersoc.org.nz)
- Leukaemia & Blood Cancer NZ on [www.leukaemia.org.nz](http://www.leukaemia.org.nz)
- For support quitting smoking, phone Once and For All on **0800 6623 4255** or Quitline on **0800 778 778** / text **4006**

### For Information Regarding Travel

*Please note that travel restrictions are changing rapidly and may be restricted completely in some areas.*

- Travel information available on <https://health.govt.nz>
- SafeTravel website <https://safetravel.govt.nz>

### For Healthcare Workers

- Resources available on <https://health.govt.nz>
- Australasian Leukaemia & Lymphoma Group (ALLG) website: <https://www.allg.org.au>
- Your affiliated professional society
  - Haematology Society of Australia & New Zealand: [www.hsanz.org.au](http://www.hsanz.org.au)
  - Bone Marrow Transplant Society of Australia & New Zealand: [www.bmtsanz.org.au](http://www.bmtsanz.org.au)



## GLOBAL

- World Health Organization (WHO) on [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)