



## ***COVID-19 guidance for children and young people with cancer undergoing treatment***

Guidance updated 17 March 2020

This guidance is intended for children and young people on active cancer treatment and up to six months after completion of treatment. Children who have received a bone marrow transplant (BMT) should direct questions to their transplant team and refer to COVID-19 guidance produced by the [UK Paediatric BMT Group](#).

This information is based on the UK Government and Public Health England advice and may differ from guidance issued from other countries. It will be regularly updated as and when new information is available. It has been written by experts in Childhood and Teenage and Young Adult cancer to reflect the particular needs of our patients.

We acknowledge there is a huge amount of information online and this can be overwhelming and sometimes conflicting, causing even more worry and stress. It is important that families make sure that information is filtered and gathered from reliable, easy to understand sources. Our booklet '[Searching for information and support online](#)' has further information.

### ***What is COVID-19?***

Coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China in December 2019. This is a rapidly evolving situation which is being monitored carefully. The current risk to the UK has been escalated to high. We understand that this is a very challenging time for everyone. We are working

together within CCLG and globally to share our understanding and information through research.

To date in the UK, we have not seen any cases of severe coronavirus disease in children who are undergoing cancer treatment. Furthermore, information from Lombardy which is the most affected area in Italy has reported no positive COVID-19 cases detected in paediatric oncology or transplanted patients so far.

### ***How is it spread?***

Similar viruses to coronavirus spread by cough droplets or sneeze droplets. These droplets fall on people in the close vicinity and can be directly inhaled or picked up on the hands and transferred when someone touches their face. COVID-19 spreads through close sustained contact with someone who has the virus (for instance being within 2 metres of someone for longer than 15 minutes).

### ***What are the symptoms?***

The symptoms of this new coronavirus (COVID-19) include cough, fever, shortness of breath, or flu-like symptoms. The current evidence is that most cases in children and young people appear to be mild.

### ***Is there a treatment available?***

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 acute respiratory disease. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus. Anti-viral medications have not yet been shown to be effective against coronavirus.

### ***How might coronavirus affect my child who is undergoing cancer treatment?***

Children and young people undergoing cancer treatment have a weakened immune system which will make it harder for the body to fight off infections such as COVID-19 (in the same way as for seasonal flu). It is important for

children with cancer and their families to follow steps to protect themselves where possible.

## ***What precautions should we take?***

Children and young people undergoing treatment and their families will already be familiar with the following [infection precautions](#) recommended by Public Health England.

- Wash your hands often - with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. This is particularly important after taking public transport.
- Try to help your child avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands where possible
- Avoid contact with people who are known to be unwell
- Try and cover your child's cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin and wash hands again after disposal.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home and work environment

## ***Should we be wearing face masks to protect ourselves from infection?***

Face masks play a very important role in clinical settings, such as hospitals but there is very little evidence of widespread benefit from their use outside of these clinical settings. Face masks must be worn correctly, changed frequently, removed properly and disposed of safely in order to be effective.

## ***What should I do if my child develops a fever or any other symptoms?***

You should follow the normal guidance for attending hospital if your child develops a fever. Your child will be assessed and treated as per your local hospital policy. If you are concerned that your child has symptoms of COVID-19

or has a known COVID-19 contact, it is essential that you inform the treating hospital before your arrival so necessary arrangements can be made.

### ***Will my child have a cubicle if they need to stay in hospital?***

It is likely that the demand for cubicles will escalate during the current pandemic. Therefore, each hospital team will need to make decisions based on individual patients need for isolation in a cubicle. Please note you might see staff looking after your child wearing additional protection such as surgical masks to help try and stop any respiratory viruses spreading and reduce the risk of transmission to staff.

### ***What if someone in our household develops symptoms?***

If other household members develop symptoms (either high temperature or a new continuous cough), the current guidance is to [stay at home](#) for 14 days to help protect others in your community (self-isolation). It is likely that people living within a household will infect each other or be infected already. Staying at home for 14 days will greatly reduce the overall amount of infection the household could pass on to others in the community. Self-isolation does not apply to children undergoing treatment for cancer who will need to be assessed in hospital first if they develop symptoms.

### ***What does self-isolation mean?***

Self-isolation involves avoiding contact with anyone within 2 metres for 15 minutes or longer. This includes contact with other people in your household and for young children is not always possible.

If any child in your house needs to self-isolate, you might choose to have one parent designated as being in close contact with your child, with both of you isolated from the rest of the household. We understand this might be impossible if there's only one parent, please see if other family members might be able to help.

## ***Will we still be visited by our outreach/community nurses?***

Currently, outreach visits to the home will be going ahead where possible. Please ensure you communicate with staff prior to any planned home visits to let them know whether any household members are symptomatic and are self-isolating.

## ***Should my child continue taking oral chemotherapy?***

It is not recommended to stop or change your child's chemotherapy to reduce the risk of neutropenia or for any other reason during the pandemic. If you have any questions regarding your child's treatment, please ask your child's consultant or a member of the team.

## ***Will the supply of my child's medications be affected by COVID-19?***

The NHS has been looking at its supply chains to ensure a secure supply of necessary drugs. There is an [action plan](#) in place to manage the supply of medicines in the UK. Currently there are no shortages linked to coronavirus and no drug manufacturers have said they expect problems with supply due to coronavirus.

## ***What about visiting my child in hospital?***

As is usual practice, any visitors who are unwell or who have any symptoms should not visit your child in hospital. All visitors should be reminded to wash their hands frequently with soap and water or use hand sanitiser. Restrictions on the number of visitors (aside from parents) are likely to be imposed by your treating hospital particularly to avoid grandparents and siblings visiting.

## ***Should we cancel my child's treatment or follow-up appointments at the hospital?***

If your child has a scheduled appointment for treatment, unless they are unwell, they should attend. In the event of any disruption to the service provided, clinicians will always make decisions to prioritise treatment for those most in

need and in consultation with patients. The chief focus will be to provide essential services, helping those most at risk to access the right treatment. Centres will be encouraged to offer telephone or Skype consultations for those patients who do not necessarily need to travel to the hospital for treatment.

### ***My child is on a clinical trial. How will this be affected by COVID-19?***

For children and young people already receiving treatment within a clinical trial, the plan will be to continue where possible and to reassess the situation frequently. Some centres have temporarily stopped recruiting to some or all clinical trials until further notice. The main purpose of such difficult decisions is to ensure that all patients get the best possible care available and those already on trials can continue. Decisions will need to be made on case-by-case basis by local teams on basis of patient safety and capacity assessment.

### ***How might coronavirus affect my child who is due to have a bone marrow transplant?***

Children and young people who are due to receive bone marrow transplant should discuss details with their transplant team. Post-transplant patients should follow standard guidance if they are unwell and any further concerns discuss with transplant team.

### ***What if there are other patients with suspected coronavirus in our hospital? Will they pose a risk to my child?***

All testing of suspected coronavirus cases is carried out in line with strict regulations in each hospital. All suspected cases are kept in isolation, away from public areas of the hospital and returned home also in isolation. Any equipment that comes into contact with suspected cases is thoroughly cleaned as appropriate. Patients and their parents can be reassured that their safety is a top priority and are encouraged to attend all essential appointments as usual.

## ***Can my child still go to school?***

No. For children and young people undergoing cancer treatment, it is recommended that they do not go to school. Most recent advice (as of 16 March 2020) is that those with a weakened immune system should follow [strict social distancing](#). Teenage and young adult patients should work from home. If your child has a scheduled hospital appointment for treatment, unless they are unwell, they should attend.

## ***What does social distancing mean?***

- Avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). These symptoms include high temperature and/or new and continuous cough
- Avoid non-essential use of public transport, varying your travel times to avoid rush hour, when possible
- For teenage and young adult patients, work from home where possible.
- For children, do not attend school.
- Avoid large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs.
- Avoid gatherings with friends and family. If they do need to visit, be extra cautious about hygiene, touching and hand-washing. Keep in touch using remote technology such as phone, internet, and social media.

## ***What about siblings and other members of the household? Do they also need to follow social distancing guidance?***

Yes. Siblings and other household members should also consider staying at home for the next 12 weeks. Current advice recommends we should all be taking steps to reduce social interaction between people in order to reduce the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). We acknowledge the challenges this will bring but everyone should be trying to follow these measures as much as is pragmatic until we have further evidence that this is no longer required. Although these measures are severe, they are considered necessary

to keep everyone as safe as possible and to help the NHS cope with the cases that do happen.

### ***Can my child go to the cinema or football matches?***

Now that there is sustained transmission of the virus in certain areas, the Government has advised people to stop non-essential contact including social venues such as cinemas and theatres. Many events have now been cancelled. Children undergoing treatment for cancer should avoid these venues and follow strict social distancing guidance as above.

### ***How do I keep myself up to date about COVID-19?***

Keep checking the [Public Health England](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england) website for regular updates.

### ***What if I have some more questions?***

Please speak to your child's consultant or any member of the team in your treating centre.

The One Cancer Voice group of charities have developed some further general guidance for cancer patients which you may find useful, although this is primarily aimed at adults with cancer.

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