

# Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Lymphoma/CLL



## WHAT IS A CORONAVIRUS AND COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel (new) coronavirus (SARS-nCov-2) that was identified in an outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause mild illnesses, such as the common cold, to more severe diseases, such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

The disease can spread from person to person, through small droplets from the nose or mouth that may spread when a person coughs or sneezes. Another person may catch COVID-19 by breathing in these droplets or by touching a surface that the droplets have landed on and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. There is currently no vaccination to prevent or treat COVID-19, however health authorities are currently working on this.

## COVID-19: HOW TO REDUCE RISK OF BEING INFECTED

Active treatment for lymphoma & CLL can reduce the effectiveness of the immune system. While we continue to learn more about COVID-19 each day, it is believed that patients with all cancers and the elderly are at a higher risk of becoming unwell with the virus. People who have weakened immune systems are at greater risk of getting infections but there are a number of steps that you and your family can take to reduce the chances of getting an infection.

**WASH YOUR HANDS** with soap and water for 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand wash. Wash your hands when you come into contact with others, before eating or touching your face, after using the bathroom and upon entering your home.

**CLEAN AND DISINFECT YOUR HOME** to remove germs. Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces such as; mobile phones, tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets and taps.

**KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE** between yourself and others. Maintain social distancing outside of your home by leaving at least 1.5 meter distance between yourself and others

**AVOID PEOPLE WHO ARE UNWELL** If you are in public and notice someone coughing/sneezing or visibly unwell, please move away

from them to protect yourself. Ensure that family/friends do not visit if they are displaying any symptoms of illness such as fever, coughing, sneezing, headache, etc.

**AVOID CROWDS** especially in poorly ventilated spaces. Your risk of exposure to respiratory viruses like COVID-19 may increase in crowded, closed-in settings with little air circulation if there are people in the crowd who are sick.

**AVOID ALL UNESSENTIAL TRAVEL** including plane trips, and especially avoid embarking on cruise ships.

Listen to recommendations made by public health officials. If COVID-19 is spreading in your local community, it is important that you stay at home as much as possible.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19?

Those infected can develop mild to severe symptoms, however some people who are infected may not develop symptoms. Common symptoms can include:

- Fever and Flu like symptoms such as coughing, sore throat and fatigue
- Shortness of breath

## WHO SHOULD BE TESTED FOR COVID-19?

People currently considered to be at risk of contracting COVID-19 infection are those who have fever and respiratory symptoms such as cough or sore throat AND:

- Have returned from overseas travel in the last 14 days, OR
- Have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case,
- Believe they have been in close contact with a person at risk of COVID-19.
- You have a severe community acquired respiratory illness with these symptoms with no clear cause.

## LYMPHOMA/CLL AND COVID-19

People who have lymphoma or CLL are at a higher risk, especially when:

- Receiving chemotherapy, or who have received

- chemotherapy in the last 3-12 months
- Receiving immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- Receiving other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors (eg. ibrutinib)
- Those who have had a bone marrow or stem cell transplant in the last 6-12 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- People with lymphoma or chronic lymphocytic leukaemia which can damage the immune system, even if they have not needed treatment or are in remission with a compromised immune system
- If you have a low-grade lymphoma/CLL and have not had treatment you are at a lower risk than someone who has had treatment, although you need to be diligent with infection precautions.
- People who are over 65 years or have co-morbidities (eg. Cardiovascular disease, lung disease or diabetes)
- Please speak to your doctor to know your individual risk.

## WHAT DO I DO IF I BECOME UNWELL?

1. If you are mildly unwell, have viral symptoms (e.g. fever and cough) and believe you may have been exposed to the coronavirus, but are not on active chemotherapy or known to have a low white cell count or be neutropenic, please contact the Coronavirus Health Information Line and your GP as a first step. Appropriate screening for coronavirus will be organised through these services, but you should highlight that you have an underlying cancer. Your GP can contact your treating team for further advice as required. For the safety of other patients, please do not present to your cancer centre with these symptoms. When you call your cancer centre, they can rebook your appointments when you ring to let them know about your illness.
2. If you are known to be neutropenic or are having treatment expected to cause neutropenia, and you become unwell or develop fevers >38C you should follow the usual precautions for febrile neutropenia and present to the emergency department.

**PLEASE NOTE:** If you have cough or shortness of breath you should phone ahead to your hospital, so appropriate triage can be organised. **Most cancer patients in this situation will have a cause other than COVID-19, however precautions will be in place until this is excluded. Please understand that this may result in changes to previous pathways, but it is done with the safety of all patients in mind.**

3. If you are very unwell you should call an ambulance and organise immediate transfer to the emergency department as you usually would.

## OTHER PRACTICAL TIPS TO KEEP HEALTHY

- Get your annual influenza vaccination as soon as possible
- Be sure you have over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies (tissues, etc.) to treat fever and other symptoms.
- Ensure you have two-three weeks supply of prescribed medication
- Practice good hygiene to prevent infections
- Eat a healthy balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids to help strengthen your immunity
- Ensure you wash and cook food thoroughly
- Get plenty of sleep and manage your stress
- Keep physically active if safe to do so
- Reduce visits to the supermarket or crowded areas by stocking a week or two at a time
- Face masks prevent the spread of viruses when infected. For those with compromised immune systems, avoiding contact with the general public is the best way to avoiding infection.

## WHAT THIS MAY MEAN FOR YOUR CANCER CENTRE VISITS?

- You may need to change clinic or treatment appointments at short notice, as directed by the hospital.
- Clinic appointments may be converted to telephone or telehealth appointments
- Before your hospital visit consider if you have travelled overseas within 14 days, had contact with persons with or suspected of having COVID-19 AND if you are unwell with respiratory symptoms including cough, fever, shortness of breath – let your cancer centre know
- It is important that you still attend your Cancer Centre for your appointments unless advised by your doctor or nurse.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information and real time updates please visit:

**Coronavirus Health Information Line: 1800 020 080**

**Australian Government Health**

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

**Centres for Disease Control and Prevention**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

For further questions you can contact the Lymphoma Nurse Support Line on **1800 953 081** or email: [nurse@lymphoma.org.au](mailto:nurse@lymphoma.org.au)

This resource was last reviewed and updated 19 March 2020.