

March 2020

COVID-19 outbreak - Recommendations for good practice for cancer patients, survivors and their caregivers

Background

The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) or COVID-19 virus is thought to spread **mainly** from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 1-2 metres).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose or eyes. Current evidence suggests that novel coronavirus may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials. On the other hand, transmission of the novel coronavirus to persons from surfaces contaminated with the virus has not been clearly demonstrated (Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>)¹.

It is highly likely that older people and those with pre-existing and severe medical conditions are at higher risk of serious illness if they become infected with COVID-19. Advice on reducing the risk of infection is therefore particularly important for **cancer patients, survivors and their caregivers**¹.

¹ Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), US. Coronavirus Diseases 2019 (COVID-19): How to Prepare. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>. [Accessed: March 2020]

Recommended good practices

This guidance needs to be referred to and applied in addition to all the other recommended good practices that aim at protecting from and safeguarding against the spread of this viral infection.

General recommended practices include:

- A. **Stay regularly up to date** by checking the coronavirus page of the Ministry for Health: www.covid19health.gov.mt or the Department of Information site on www.covid19malta.info.
- B. **Avoid all non-essential travel** abroad.
- C. **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, before preparing and/or eating food, before and after going to the bathroom and on returning home from outside.
- D. If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-70% alcohol**. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they air dry.
- E. **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow**. Throw used tissues in the lidded trash bin. Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- F. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands.
- G. **Regularly clean frequently touched objects and surfaces** with regular household detergent and water. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks. Allow enough contact time as indicated by the detergent's manufacturer.
- H. **Avoid contact with anyone who is ill** with a fever, cough or difficulty breathing.
- I. Take everyday precautions to keep space between yourself and others. **Avoid crowds** as much as possible. Practice social distancing. Refrain from frequenting public places. Avoid direct physical social contact practices such as hugs and handshakes.
- J. If you are ill, minimise contact with others, especially those who have medical conditions, are elderly or pregnant.

Additional recommended good practices for cancer patients, survivors and their caregivers to reduce the risk of getting infected with COVID-19 infection include:

- K. **In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak in your community, stay home as much as possible to further reduce your risk of being exposed.**
- L. **Stock up on necessary supplies.** Consider using the helplines (call 21 411 411 or 2590 3030) if you cannot go out and need help to get groceries/food and/or medicines.
- M. Contact your caring team to ask about obtaining extra **necessary medications** to have on hand in case there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community and you need to stay home for a prolonged period of time.
- N. Have enough **household items and groceries** on hand so that you will be prepared to stay at home for a period of time. Consider ways of getting food brought to your house through family, social, or commercial networks.

UNLESS OTHERWISE INSTRUCTED BY YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU CONTINUE TO ATTEND FOR YOUR SCHEDULED MEDICAL CARE.

PATIENTS THAT ARE ACTIVELY UNDERGOING CHEMOTHERAPY OR RADIOTHERAPY ARE TO CALL THEIR RESPECTIVE CLINIC BEFORE ATTENDING IF THEY DEVELOP A FEVER.

PATIENTS HAVING A SCHEDULED APPOINTMENT AT SAMOC ARE TO INFORM THEIR RESPECTIVE CLINIC FOR FURTHER GUIDANCE BEFORE COMING TO THE HOSPITAL IF THEY DEVELOP A FEVER. THEY MAY BE ADVISED TO CALL 111.

References

1. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), US. Coronavirus Diseases 2019 (COVID-19): How to Prepare. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>. [Accessed: March 2020]
2. Health Services Executive, Ireland – Cancer Services. Available from: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/news/covid-19.html>. [Accessed: March 2020]