



CANCER AND CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

INTRODUCTION

For adult patients only. For children and teens, refer to the IWK Health Centre [Pediatric Cancer and Blood Disorders Immunocompromised Patients COVID Information Sheet](#).

The Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program understands that cancer patients, cancer survivors and their families and friends may have questions about COVID-19.

If you are having cancer treatment, your immune system may not be as strong as it is normally. You may feel concerned about the risks associated with COVID-19 and how it may affect your cancer care plans.

Your Cancer Care Team is working very hard to keep you safe and follows recommendations from Public Health. We will contact you if your upcoming appointment can be rescheduled or changed to a phone or video appointment. This will reduce the need for you to go out into public.

If you are having any cancer-related symptoms you need help with, please call your cancer care team.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that can cause mild to severe infections in the lungs. Like other viruses, it can lead to serious infections for people with weakened immune systems. COVID-19 may cause more severe infections than other viruses.

The virus can spread easily, just like the common cold or flu. It spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes droplets that can get into the eyes, nose, or mouth of people nearby. Droplets also land on surfaces that people touch before touching their own eyes, nose, or mouth.

I live outside Nova Scotia but travel there for cancer care. What do I need to know?

Travel to Nova Scotia for a medical appointment is considered essential travel. In this instance, the patient and one support person may travel to Nova Scotia for the medical appointment without having to self-isolate if they do not have symptoms of COVID-19.

[Details regarding travel restrictions are available here.](#)

How can I protect myself?

Visit the [Government of Nova Scotia COVID-19 website](#) to learn the latest ways to help protect yourself.

If you are currently having treatment for cancer or living with someone who is currently having treatment for cancer, here are some extra steps you can take to protect yourself:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Ask someone else to run your errands, such as grocery and prescription pick up, so you do not have to go out in public. You may also be able to have things delivered to your house.
- Always practice social distancing by staying at least 6 feet (2 metres) away from anyone you do not live with.
- Follow public health guidelines for masking
- Avoid contact with those who are sick or at the risk of being exposed to COVID-19.
- Be as healthy as you can. Get plenty of sleep, eat healthy, exercise and manage your stress.
- Stop smoking.
 - Tobacco-Free Nova Scotia offers personalized and non-judgmental support to help you quit and stay quit. Whether you are thinking about quitting or having some setbacks, trained counsellors can help you each step of the way. All services are free and confidential. You can find out all about the supports offered at Tobacco-Free N.S. on their website at <https://tobaccofree.novascotia.ca/>

I feel sick and am worried it might be COVID-19. What should I do?

Cancer Patients on Systemic Therapy who have Yellow or Orange Alert Cards

If you have a fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher and/or develop a new cough or shortness of breath **go directly to the Emergency Department (ED)**. For any other symptoms, during the regular workweek, call your cancer team. During the weekend or after hours, call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Other Cancer Patients currently receiving Radiation or Systemic Therapy treatment **without Yellow or Orange Alert Card**

If you develop a fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher, a new or worsening cough or shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose or headache and it is during the regular work week, call your cancer team. During the weekend or after hours, call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Patients with Cancer or a History of Cancer and Not Currently on Treatment

If you have a fever greater than 38°C (100.4°F) a new or worsening cough or shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose or headache, please call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

If you have previously received **Radiation Therapy to the chest** (lung or breast) and have tested negative for COVID-19 but still have a cough or shortness of breath and/or fever, please contact your Radiation Oncologist during the regular workweek at 902-473-6067 (Halifax) or 902-567-7771 (Sydney).

If you are having difficulty breathing or any symptoms that you are unable to manage at home, please go directly to the Emergency Department or call 911.

I have been tested for COVID-19. What should I do now?

If you are currently receiving treatment for your cancer, or are being followed by a cancer care team, call your team to let them know you have been tested for COVID-19. Also, call your cancer care team with any COVID-19 test results.

If you have been tested for COVID-19 and are waiting for results, you should monitor yourself for symptoms and self-isolate at home. You should receive a call from Public Health once your test results are known. For more information on self-monitoring and self-isolation, please visit the [Government of Nova Scotia COVID-19 website](#)

I have cancer, should I wear a mask?

Patients, visitors, and essential support people will be given a medical mask when in hospitals and other health care facilities.

When worn properly, non-medical masks can reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. Your mask can be a commercial non-medical mask or a homemade mask that covers your nose and mouth.

Detailed information on provincial mask requirements can be found at novascotia.ca/coronavirus/masks

Can I bring someone with me to my cancer care appointment?

Please see the current Nova Scotia Visitor Restrictions at: <http://www.nshealth.ca/coronavirus-home/nova-scotia-health-visitor-restrictions>

How will the cancer system protect me during this time?

Before your appointment, your care team will phone you to ask questions about your health. We may ask some patients to wait in a separate room or to reschedule until they are feeling better if they have symptoms.

We are also taking extra steps to clean and disinfect surfaces throughout hospitals and clinics. We provide hand sanitizers throughout all hospitals and we ask you to sit 6 feet (2 meters) apart from other patients in the waiting areas.

What should I expect to be different at my cancer care appointment?

We are committed to you and your care during this challenging time.

- Some appointments may be by phone or video. This will reduce the need for you to go out into public.
- You will need to wear a medical mask provided to you during your appointment.
- You will see hospital and cancer care staff wearing masks and other protective equipment.
- We ask that you arrive at your scheduled appointment on time but not early.
- We ask you to sit 6 feet (2 meters) apart from other patients in the waiting areas.
- If you need American Sign Language or language service interpreters for your appointment, please call your cancer care team before your appointment.

Should I have the seasonal Flu vaccine this year?

Please take a moment to read the patient information sheet about the importance of having the flu shot this year and when to get it: <https://www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/nscgp0031.pdf>

Don't hesitate to speak with your health care team and cancer care team about any questions you have.

I have questions about the COVID-19 Vaccine?

Please take a moment to review the COVID-19 Vaccination and Cancer FAQ

Lodging

Please let your cancer care team know if you need a place to stay during your cancer treatment. The team will make arrangements for you.

I have prescriptions that need to be filled. What do I need to know?

During the pandemic, community pharmacies in Nova Scotia may experience increased prescription requests, may be working with less staff and reduced hours. This means you may have to wait longer to have your prescription filled.

These steps will help you to fill your prescription:

- Ask your health provider if they can fax or phone your prescription to your preferred pharmacy.
- Plan ahead. Allow up to 48 hours for community pharmacies to fill your prescriptions. If you would like your medications to be blister packed, allow 72 hours' notice.
- Ask your pharmacy if they have a delivery service. This will reduce unnecessary trips.
- Phone the pharmacy before you pick up your prescription to ensure it is ready.

For questions about your prescriptions, please contact your community pharmacy and ask to speak to a pharmacist.

I am struggling with worry and anxiety, what can I do, where can I get support?

It is understandable to feel anxious and concerned at this time. You can help yourself by:

- Getting information from trusted source like the Nova Scotia Health Authority, Government of Nova Scotia and Health Canada.
- Limiting your time watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media, as hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.

- Taking care of your body: Taking slow deep breaths, stretching, or meditating.
- Eating healthy, balanced meals, being physically active, getting plenty of sleep
- Avoiding alcohol and drugs.
- Making time to relax by focusing on yourself and doing activities you enjoy.
- Connecting with others, talking with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Maintaining a sense of hope and keeping things in perspective

If you are having a lot of difficulty coping with worry and anxiety, please call the local number below for information and support:

- **Halifax Regional Municipality:** 902-240-8129
- **Cape Breton:** 902-567-8551
- **Antigonish/Guysborough/Richmond and South Eastern Inverness:** 902-863-2830 Ext 4707
- **Yarmouth/Shelburne/Digby:** 902-749-1523
- **Lunenburg and Queens County:** 902-527-5820 or email Chantal.boudreau@nshealth.ca
- **Kings/Annapolis County:** 902-690-3700
- **For all other parts of the province** call toll-free: 1-866-599-2267

Other supports, while not cancer patient specific, may be helpful:

- Nova Scotia Health Mental Health and Addictions
<http://www.nshealth.ca/mental-health-addictions>
 - Nova Scotia Health Mental Health and Addictions crisis phone line: 1-888-429-8167
 - Kids Help Phone: Text CONNECT to 686868
- Nova Scotia Government list of resources <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/mental-health/>

Is quitting or trying to quit smoking important for cancer patients during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes.

Stopping tobacco use increases the effectiveness of cancer treatment by between 30 and 40 percent. This means quitting or trying to quit smoking and other kinds of tobacco use is important for cancer patients at any time.

Many cancer patients have weaker immune systems due to the cancer itself, or because of cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy. For this reason, cancer patients may be at increased risk to develop COVID-19. Research suggests that those who develop COVID-19 and smoke may have more severe symptoms. The COVID-19 pandemic is another reason to try to quit smoking.¹

For support to reduce or quit tobacco:

Tobacco-Free Nova Scotia offers personalized and non-judgmental support to help you quit and stay quit. Whether you are thinking about quitting or having some setbacks,

trained counsellors can help you each step of the way. All services are free and confidential. You can find out all about the supports offered at Tobacco-Free N.S. on their website at <https://tobaccofree.novascotia.ca/>

Additional support information on smoking cessation for cancer patients is available on the Nova Scotia Health library guides page.

<https://library.nshealth.ca/Cancer/StoppingTobaccoUse>

Temporary suspension of the Colon Cancer Prevention Program

The Colon Cancer Prevention Program has resumed mailing home screening kits. For updated information on this program reintroduction please visit:

<http://www.nshealth.ca/service-reintroduction-notices/cancer-care-program-service-reintroductions>

Temporary suspension of the Cervical Cancer Prevention Program (routine Pap test)

Cervical cancer screening has resumed across the province. For updated information Nova Scotia Health's progress with service reintroduction, please visit:

<http://www.nshealth.ca/service-reintroduction-notices/cancer-care-program-service-reintroductions>

¹Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. *Covid-19 in relation to smoking and cancer patients summary of evidence*. Toronto (on): Canadian Partnership Against Cancer; 2020 April.

Learn more

[Cancer and Coronavirus Patient Handout](#)

[Nova Scotia Health COVID-19](#)

[Government of Nova Scotia COVID-19](#)

[Government of Canada COVID-19](#)

[Tobacco Free Nova Scotia](#)

