

COVID-19 VACCINES AND PATIENTS WITH CANCER

The current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for patients with cancer is to receive recommended dose(s) of one of the three approved COVID-19 vaccines to prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection and/or severe disease. Because of the complex nature of cancer, and how anticancer treatments affect the immune system, responsiveness of patients with cancer to COVID-19 vaccines is an area of active research, rapidly yielding new information. It is important for patients with cancer to discuss risks and benefits of receiving one of the COVID-19 vaccines with their health care providers, who can offer up-to-date information and expert advice for the best time to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.



Here we summarize the state of the current knowledge on COVID-19 vaccination for patients with cancer and their caregivers:

Should patients with cancer, including those receiving active anticancer treatment, get vaccinated?

Yes. CDC and multiple expert panels recommend that all patients with cancer, including those who are being actively treated for their cancer, should receive one of the three COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for the general population. Patients with cancer should get vaccinated as soon as possible. Furthermore, their response to primary vaccination may wane over time, so they should keep in close consultation with their health care provider teams to determine if and when they will need additional vaccination.

Are vaccines safe for patients with cancer and survivors of cancer?

COVID-19 vaccines are safe for patients with cancer and cancer survivors.

Are vaccines effective in patients with cancer?

Vaccines are effective in patients with cancer. However, emerging data suggest that the response to COVID-19 vaccines in patients with cancer varies depending on the type of cancer as well as the anticancer treatment.

What else can one do to minimize the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection and/or severe COVID-19 for patients with cancer?

Any caregiver or person in close contact with a patient with cancer, including those living in the same household as the patient with cancer, should also get vaccinated.

Should a patient with cancer who has been fully vaccinated continue to follow CDC recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Yes. Because certain patients with cancer may not elicit the expected strong immune response to vaccination, a fully vaccinated patient with cancer should continue to follow CDC recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including wearing a mask, maintaining social distance, frequently washing hands, avoiding crowded gatherings, minimizing nonessential travel, and any other protective measures.

Does vaccination impact screening for certain cancers?

Possibly. Studies have found that, like other vaccines, COVID-19 vaccines can cause swollen lymph nodes. Swollen lymph nodes can affect interpretation of imaging results, especially in mammograms that are used to screen for breast cancer. Experts recommend delaying imaging by four to six weeks after getting vaccinated, and patients with breast cancer should discuss with their health care providers the optimal time to schedule a mammogram in relation to vaccination against COVID-19.

Should a patient with cancer get additional primary and/or booster dose(s) of COVID-19 vaccine?

Yes. CDC recommends additional primary and/or booster dose(s) of either the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna vaccine for people who are immunocompromised, including those receiving active cancer treatment for solid tumors or hematologic cancers.