

Hematology/oncology patients and coronavirus (COVID-19): What our families should know

We know that having cancer or a blood disorder can be stressful enough for our families. We hope these FAQs will answer your top questions about the COVID-19 pandemic and put your mind at ease about our ability to continue care for your child and family. We are closely monitoring COVID-19 and have plans in place to continue critical treatment for cancer and blood disorders.

What is the coronavirus?

Human coronaviruses are a family of seven known types of viruses that are found throughout the world. The type of coronavirus in the news right now is the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19), which causes mild to severe breathing problems.

What are the signs of COVID-19?

COVID-19 causes cold or flu-like symptoms. These may include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, body aches or chills. It can cause serious problems, such as pneumonia and even death, especially in older people and people with other health problems, including cancer.

How does COVID-19 spread?

The virus is thought to spread from person to person through droplets when someone with COVID-19 coughs or sneezes near another person. These droplets can land on people and surfaces within about 6 feet. COVID-19 is a new disease, and **we are still learning how it spreads**, the severity of illness it causes and to what extent it may spread in the United States.

Are there special concerns for children with cancer, sickle cell and other blood disorders?

Children with cancer and blood disorders often have weakened immune systems and are considered "immunocompromised." This is usually due to treatment for their cancer, such as a bone marrow transplant for blood cancer or intensive chemotherapy for certain types of leukemia. People can also become immunocompromised from intense radiation therapy or surgery. Having a weak immune system makes it harder

for the body to fight off illnesses, so it's important for children with cancer and their family members to closely follow steps to protect themselves.

Should I stop taking medications?

We do NOT recommend stopping any long-term medications because maintaining good control of underlying conditions is one of the best strategies to avoid more severe complications. Avoiding flares of underlying disease will help prevent unnecessary trips to the hospital, where patients who could have COVID-19 are likely to be seeking care. It is a good idea to make sure you have refilled prescriptions and have at least a two-week supply of medications on hand.

Is it OK for my child to go to the Children's Pavilion and inpatient units for cancer treatment?

If your child doesn't have a fever or respiratory symptoms, we recommend keeping scheduled clinic and treatment appointments. If your child has mild symptoms, we recommend rescheduling an appointment if it is not urgent. If you have symptoms and the appointment is urgent, please contact us prior to coming to see us so we can take appropriate precautions. If you are concerned about coming to CHoR for care, please connect with us through the My VCU Health patient portal at chrichmond.org or by calling 804-828-CHOR (2467).

What do I need to know before I go to an appointment?

If your child has cold or flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, body aches, or chills), you must call the clinic office before coming to the Children's Pavilion, even if you have an appointment. Tell them about your symptoms. Also, if your friends and family have any cold or flu-like symptoms, they should not visit or come with your child to CHoR at this time.

For your protection, we are currently limiting the number of visitors and/or people who can accompany patients. Learn more about the changes to our visitor policy at chrichmond.org/COVID19

What should I do if my child was potentially exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19?

Please keep in mind that our clinic is full of children with compromised immune systems. It's everyone's responsibility to speak up to keep our kids and team members healthy and safe. If you or your child were notified by your local health department of a potential exposure to someone with COVID-19 and have no symptoms, call us and tell us about the exposure. We will give you instructions on what you should do. **If you have cold or flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, body aches or chills), you must call the clinic before coming.** We will give you instructions so we can deliver care to you safely.

Can my child be tested for COVID-19?

If your child has cold or flu-like symptoms and has been exposed to COVID-19, we will work with state and local health departments and the CDC to determine if they should be tested for COVID-19.

The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

The CDC recommends the following:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available
- Stay home when you are sick
- Get plenty of rest
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces
- Only wear a facemask if a health care professional recommends it
- People who have COVID-19 should use a facemask to protect others from risk of infection

Where can I get more information?

COVID-19 hotline for current CHoR and VCU Health patients: **804-628-7425**

CHoR updates: chrichmond.org/COVID19

U.S. Department of State: travel.state.gov

CDC: cdc.gov

If you have questions or concerns about how our precautions impact your child's health care, please contact us through the My VCU Health patient portal at chrichmond.org or call 804-828-CHOR (2467). If you think you or your child has been exposed to COVID-19, our hotline is also available and staffed with knowledgeable nurses: 804-628-7425.