

COVID-19 Guidance and for children and young people undergoing cancer treatment

25th of March 2020

UPDATE

The global pandemic of COVID-19 is accelerating rapidly. Understandably, this is causing considerable anxiety among the entire population but especially for families with individuals who might be vulnerable to more severe infection. Recommendations regarding social distancing and isolation precautions for the community are changing rapidly and the importance of adherence to these guidelines cannot be under-estimated.

We are monitoring the experience of paediatric oncology units in countries that are further advanced in this pandemic than Australia and New Zealand as closely as we can. Reassuringly, reports from China and Italy do not suggest that children with cancer are at significantly increased risk of severe infection. To date, there has only been one report of a child with cancer who required intensive care support and very few reports of infection overall.

Despite this reassuring information, we must continue to assume that children who are receiving chemotherapy or radiotherapy, have had a bone marrow transplant within the past 12 months, are receiving active treatment for GVHD or who have heart or lung problems as a result of their cancer treatment are at some increased risk of more severe infection and as the spread of this virus in our communities increases we wholeheartedly endorse families taking additional precautions to minimise the risk of their children contracting the virus.

Recommendations regarding school attendance and social distancing precautions might differ depending upon where you live in Australia and New Zealand as different states are at different stages of the pandemic and individual jurisdictions have mandated different restrictions.

Up to date, there has not been any significant interruption of paediatric oncology services in our two countries and we hope that there will not be. At this stage, we anticipate that we will be able to continue all children's planned therapy. Many centres are conducting routine follow up appointments by telehealth to minimise the number of people needing to attend our hospitals.

The area most significantly affected to date has been the provision of unrelated donor stem cells from international donors for bone marrow transplantation. The Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry is working tirelessly to endeavour to ensure the continued supply of this precious resource.

In summary, we hope that the initial reports suggesting children with cancer do not have a high risk of severe infection with COVID-19 are somewhat reassuring. However, this information is only preliminary and as such we must continue to regard children with cancer as a vulnerable population. Therefore, we recommend adherence to the strictest isolation precautions that you and your family are able to achieve. Adherence to such precautions will optimise protection for your child and also benefit the community as a whole as we deal with this crisis.

We will continue to provide the Australian and New Zealand paediatric oncology community with updates as they become available.

Frequently asked question – [click here](#).