Introduction: COVID-19 and your radiotherapy treatment

Radiotherapy treatment typically happens every weekday for over a few weeks. It can sometimes cause symptoms that are similar to the symptoms of COVID-19. COVID-19 can also cause symptoms that may be mistaken for side effects from your treatment. The key thing is to make your team aware of changes in your health and wellness so that they can look after you and give the best advice. You should typically have a way of contacting your treatment team if you notice anything different. Even if you notice a small change, let them know.

Treatment centres have different approaches to COVID-19

You may still be asked to do a COVID-19 test on a weekly basis, and tell your team if there are any changes

You may have your appointment moved to the end of the day if you test positive for COVID-19, to try and prevent other patients from catching it

You may be asked to take other steps to reduce the risk of catching and spreading COVID-19

Some staff and some patients may still wear face masks. If you are more comfortable wearing a face mask, please do so

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a virus.

Most people that get COVID-19 will recover without needing special treatment. However, some will need medical help. Older people and people with medical conditions like cancer are more likely to develop a serious illness. Sadly, anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill at any age.

Symptoms of COVID-19: from NHS UK website

COVID-19 symptoms can include:

a high temperature or shivering (chills) – a high temperature means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)

a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours

a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

shortness of breath

feeling tired or exhausted

an aching body

a headache

a sore throat

a blocked or runny nose

loss of appetite

diarrhoea

feeling sick or being sick

The symptoms are very similar to symptoms of other illnesses, such as colds and flu.

How to avoid catching and spreading COVID-19: from NHS UK website

get vaccinated if you are eligible

wash your hands with soap and water throughout the day. Especially after you cough, sneeze or blow your nose, and before you eat or handle food

cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze and ask children to do this too

clean surfaces you touch often (like door handles) and in shared spaces (like kitchens)

think about wearing a face covering that fits snugly against your face and has more than 1 layer. Especially in busy, crowded places

do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean

Further resources

Macmillan Cancer Support has a detailed website page for patients and families to learn more about COVID-19 and cancer treatment. Macmillan Cancer Support is a Trusted Information Creator, accredited with the Patient Information Forum.

Visit the Macmillan Cancer Support website

https://www.macmillan.org.uk/coronavirus/cancer-and-coronavirus

Government advice

Visit for COVID-19 guidance from NHS England

https://www.nhs.uk/covid-19-advice-and-services/

Visit for COVID-19 guidance from NHS Scotland

https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19/

Visit for COVID-19 guidance from NHS Wales

https://111.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/c/article/coronavirus(covid19)/

Visit for COVID-19 guidance from Health and Social Care Northern Ireland

https://covid-19.hscni.net/