

**Cancer in the context of COVID-19: Summary of emerging evidence**

Date: 24 March 2020

The CRI presents a selection of emerging research articles and clinical practice guidelines related to cancer and COVID-19, with a summary of their key findings/recommendations (links to the articles are embedded as hyperlinks in the titles). This is the first of our weekly compilation, which we plan to update and disseminate as the pandemic evolves globally and nationally.

For this week, we are summarizing the information we shared in the past weeks via the [**CRI Twitter page (@UctCri)**.](https://twitter.com/UctCri) We hope that insights from these pieces of evidence will help guide how we rethink cancer prevention, treatment and care in the context of the ongoing pandemic, in view of its unprecedented implications for patients, healthcare providers and the community in general. In our next update, we will prioritize information from available clinical guidelines related to the management of cancer in COVID-19 outbreak settings.

**1. Journal publications**

[**Wenhua et al. Cancer Patients in SARS-CoV-2 Infection: A Nationwide Analysis in China. Lancet Oncol, 21 (3), 335-337 Mar 2020. PMID: 32066541 DOI: 10.1016/S1470-2045(20)30096-6**](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045%2820%2930096-6/fulltext)

**Country context:** China

This recent study analysed the risk of incidence, severity and fatality of [COVID](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID?src=hashtag_click)-19 in patients with [cancer](https://twitter.com/hashtag/cancer?src=hashtag_click). The authors observed that cancer patients had higher risks of infection and poorer clinical outcomes. Based on their findings, the authors propose three healthcare strategies for managing patients with cancer during the COVID-19 outbreak: (1) Intentional postponing/delay of adjuvant chemotherapy or elective surgery for stable cancer patients should be considered in areas with high COVID-19 incidence. (2) Stronger personal protection provisions should be made for patients with cancer. (3) Intensive surveillance, treatment and critical care should be considered when cancer patients test positive for COVID-19, especially in older patients or those with co-morbidities.

[**Ueda et al. Managing Cancer Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Agility and Collaboration Toward a Common Goal. J Natl Compr Canc Netw. 2020 Mar 20:1-4. doi: 10.6004/jnccn.2020.7560. [Epub ahead of print].**](https://jnccn.org/fileasset/jnccn1804-Ueda_20118_preprint.pdf)

**Country context:** USA

This special feature highlights the unique circumstances and challenges of cancer treatment during a pandemic, and the importance of organizational structure, preparation, agility, and a shared vision for continuing to provide cancer treatment to patients in the face of uncertainty and rapid change. The authors highlight various clinical, administrative and ethical considerations for managing cancer patients, in out-patient, in-patient and critical care settings.

**[Yang et al. Challenges and Countermeasures of Integrative Cancer Therapy in the Epidemic of COVID-19. Integr Cancer Ther. 2020 Jan-Dec;19:1534735420912811. doi: 10.1177/1534735420912811.](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1534735420912811%22%20%5Co%20%22Integrative%20cancer%20therapies.)**

**Country context:** Global

In this letter to the Editor, the authors make a case for integrated cancer therapeutic approaches involving close contact with cancer patients, such as acupuncture and massage which are widely used to relieve and control a variety of symptoms in cancer patients, to be re-considered or avoided in areas with high incidence of COVID-19. Where other alternatives are not feasible, they advise that strong personal protection provisions should be made for patients undergoing integrative cancer with therapists.

**[Yan et al. Clinical Management of Lung Cancer Patients During the Outbreak of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). Zhongguo Fei Ai Za Zhi, 23 2020 Feb 20. PMID: 32077441 DOI: 10.3779/j.issn.1009-3419.2020.03.02](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32077441/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**

**Country context:** Global

The authors note that, due to the suppression of immunity often caused by cancer and anticancer treatments, lung cancer patients are more susceptible to infection than healthy individuals. Therefore, they recommend that lung cancer patients should be the priority group for COVID-19 prevention. They also recommend regular COVID-19 risk assessment of lung cancer patients (such as temperature and respiratory symptoms monitoring) during the period of the outbreak period, especially in patients currently undergoing anti-cancer treatment.

**[Li et al. Chemotherapy strategy for colorectal cancer under the outbreak of corona virus disease 2019. Zhonghua Wei Chang Wai Ke Za Zhi. 2020 Mar 25;23(3):217-219. doi: 10.3760/cma.j.cn.441530-20200225-00089](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32192297/%22%20%5Co%20%22Zhonghua%20wei%20chang%20wai%20ke%20za%20zhi%20%3D%20Chinese%20journal%20of%20gastrointestinal%20surgery.)**

**Country context:** China

This article explores various strategies for treating patients with colorectal cancer in the setting of a COVID-19 outbreak. The authors emphasize that cancer patients are more susceptible to infection and that clinical stage is an important poor prognostic factor, which challenges both doctors and patients. They suggest that the onset of fever in cancer patients during chemotherapy warrants a COV1D-19 differential diagnosis and screening according to national standards. They also suggest that maintenance therapy should be considered as the optimal choice for metastatic colorectal cancer patients, while adjuvant chemotherapy can be used to reduce the intensity of treatment and shorten the therapy time.

**2. Guidelines and sites**

**A. For providers**

[**National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). COVID-19 rapid guideline: delivery of systemic anticancer treatments. NICE guideline [NG161]. Published date: March 2020**](https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng161)

**Country context:** UK

Guidelines for the systemic treatment of COVID-19 in cancer patients. Among other things, NICE recommends the prioritisation of patients for systemic anticancer treatment during the COVID-19 outbreak. Prioritization should take into account the level of immunosuppression associated with individual treatments and cancer types, and any other patient-specific risk factors; capacity issues, such as limited resources (workforce, facilities, intensive care, equipment) and balancing the risk of cancer not being treated optimally with the risk of the patient being immunosuppressed and becoming seriously ill from COVID‑19.

[**MedicineNet. How Is Cancer Oncology Adapting to COVID-19? March 2020**](https://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=229132)

**Country context:** USA

As the coronavirus pandemic escalates in the United States, Medscape [Oncology](https://www.medicinenet.com/cancer_101_pictures_slideshow/article.htm) reached out to a group of cancer care providers and asked them to share their perspectives on how their [oncology](https://www.medicinenet.com/cancer_101_pictures_slideshow/article.htm) departments and centres were responding to the situation. This article highlights their responses, which reflect a number of issues oncologists and other cancer care providers are facing in the US and around the world.

[**National Comprehensive Cancer Network. How to manage cancer care during COVID-19 pandemic. March, 2020**](https://www.nccn.org/covid-19/)

**Country context:** USA

A set of general guidelines for the management of cancer in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides recommendations and resources for oncology care providers, covering areas of visitor policies, patient scheduling recommendations, as well as self-care and stress management strategies during the COVID-19 crisis.

**B. For patients and caregivers**

[**Irish National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP). Information on COVID-19 coronavirus for cancer patients and their families/carers**](https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/5/cancer/news/covid-19.html)

**Country context:** Republic of Ireland

This webpage provides some guidance specific to COVID-19 for cancer patients and their care givers.

**[Vox.com. The dilemmas facing cancer doctors and patients in the coronavirus pandemic. Mar 20, 2020](https://www.vox.com/2020/3/20/21186681/coronavirus-cancer-treatment)**

**Country context:** USA

This news article shares reflections of doctors’ frontline experiences and the challenges they face while managing cancer patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.