

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

Update 25/3/2020

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 as closely as we can. Reassuringly, reports from China and Italy do not suggest that children with cancer are at a 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 we continue to recommend additional precautions to protect them against infection.

We continue to recommend that you do not send your child to school. If you are able to keep your child home from school, we would additionally recommend that their siblings do not attend school at this stage. We also recommend that all family members apply strict social distancing precautions as much as possible. We understand that this will vary according to individual family's circumstances. However, the principles should include only leaving the house for essential purposes including work if not able to be performed from home and scheduled medical appointments and avoiding any social gatherings.

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 would recommend adherence to the strictest isolation precautions that you and your family are able to achieve.

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