Coronavirus Guidelines from CancerCare

The national cancer support organization offers helpful advice for people with cancer to protect themselves from the novel coronavirus.

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Protect Yourself and Others

There is great uncertainty in the spread and dangers of COVID-19. Keep the following points in mind in order to reduce your exposure, especially as those with a cancer diagnosis can be at greater risk, should they contract the virus. Please keep apprised of more information at the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Have supplies ready:

 Try to obtain extra necessary medications in case your community experiences an outbreak of COVID-19 and you need to stay home for a prolonged period of time. Consider using mail-order medications, if possible.

 Be stocked with over-the-counter medicines and medical supplies, such as tissues and medication good for fighting upper respiratory ailments. Stock enough household products and groceries to reduce the need to leave your home.

Take everyday measures:

 Avoid close contact with others as much as possible. Symptoms of COVID-19 may not appear in those that have it. Avoid surfaces such as elevator buttons, door handles, handrails, or handshakes with others. Use a tissue or sleeve to cover your hand if you must do so, then wash as soon as possible. Avoid touching your face, nose and eyes when in public.

 Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, which is about the time it takes to sing “Happy Birthday,” or use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Clean and disinfect your home to remove germs, especially frequently-touched surfaces (tables, doorknobs, light switches, desks, toilets, faucets and sinks).

Interacting with your community:

 Avoid crowds, especially in poorly ventilated spaces. COVID-19 can linger even after an infected person has moved on. Avoid any non-essential travel, including plane flights and especially long, contained trips such as cruises. Remote from home, if possible, or make other plans for work.

Using caregivers and others:

- If you can, use the help of others to fetch or deliver anything you might need, including food and medical supplies. This reduces your exposure to others as much as possible.

- Even when using this help, ask for them to disinfect themselves and then clean any deliveries you might receive. Caregivers should use the same precautions in public that those with a cancer diagnosis do.

Emotional Support for Yourself and Others

An ever-evolving event such as this can lead to increased anxiety, particularly for those affected by cancer. It is important to remember that while we do not have control of the world around us, we are not helpless in how we choose to respond. As a person effected by cancer, there are ways to cope with the feelings that may arise.

Stay present:

- It can be easy to let the worry feel all consuming. While you may begin thinking about what is currently happening, you may soon begin projecting about the future. When you feel this happening, remind yourself that nothing is certain. Take a moment to reconnect with yourself – take in the sights, sounds, smells and other sensory experiences around you and name them. Engaging in these mindfulness activities is one way to help keep you grounded when things feel beyond your control.

Educate yourself:

- It's important to educate yourself on the Coronavirus and how to stay safe. However, there is such thing as too much information. With the current health crisis, the news on the Coronavirus is 24/7. This can be extremely overwhelming. Instead, keep yourself informed by referring to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for the most up-to-date information.

Take care of yourself:

- Whether you have cancer, or are caring for a loved one with cancer, it is important to take extra care of yourself. There are preventive measures one can take to limit one's susceptibility to the Coronavirus. Keep in mind the basic practices enumerated in the bullet points above. Wash your hands, most especially, and remind others to wash theirs. Continue to take medications on schedule. Try to reduce your exposure by staying in your home. Reach out to your medical team if there are any concerns with regards to upcoming treatments or medical procedures.

Get support:

- You are not alone! While it can be easy to feel this way given recent precautions, there are other ways to get support other than in-person. Call a trusted friend or family member. Whether through friends, family, professional counseling or support groups, finding somewhere to talk with people who understand can help you feel less alone.

This article was originally published on March 13 as "An Update from CancerCare" on CancerCare News. It is republished with permission.

To learn more about CancerCare, see the Cancer Health article, “If You Have Cancer, Help Is Just a Phone Call Away.”

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