COVID Risk for Cancer Survivors

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Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, people with cancer have heard conflicting messages about their risk. People with active cancer—especially blood cancers like leukemia. or lymphoma—and those receiving certain types of cancer treatment are more likely to have worse COVID outcomes. What's more, they may not respond as well to COVID vaccines, especially if they are taking medications that damage antibody-producing B cells. But this does not appear to be the case for cancer survivors.

Researchers at UTHealth Houston used electronic health records to assess the association between COVID outcomes and cancer in 300,000 adults seen at nearly 8,000 hospitals and clinics during the first year of the pandemic, before vaccines were available.

Overall, cancer patients had a higher risk for COVID hospitalization and death than people never diagnosed with cancer. Breaking this down, people with a recent diagnosis were 10% more likely to be hospitalized and had a 17% increased risk of death. Those who received chemotherapy or radiation within the past three months also had higher mortality.

But cancer survivors, people diagnosed with cancer more than a year ago and those who were not on active treatment did not have worse outcomes compared with the general population. People with recently diagnosed cancer and those on treatment can reduce their risk for poor COVID outcomes by getting the recommended vaccines and boosters and, if they do not respond well, taking Evusheld for pre-exposure prophylaxis

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