COVID-19 Outcomes

Several studies show how COVID-19 affects people with cancers based on their cancer type, disease stage and mode of treatment.

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People with cancer are at greater risk for severe COVID-19, but this depends on their specific cancer type, disease stage and mode of treatment, researchers reported at the American Association for Cancer Research virtual annual meeting in April and in the AACR journal Cancer Discovery.

A study in China compared 105 COVID-19 patients with cancer and 536 people without. Overall, those with cancer were nearly three times more likely to have severe illness, be admitted to an intensive care unit or be put on a ventilator. What's more, they were about twice as likely to die (11% versus 5%). But people with certain cancer types fared worse: Two thirds of those with blood cancers and half of those with lung cancer had severe events. Patients with metastatic cancer had about a sixfold higher risk of severe illness or death, but those whose cancer had not yet spread had about the same risk as people without cancer.

In another study, researchers identified 218 COVID-19 patients with cancer at Montefiore Health System in the Bronx. Over a quarter (28%) died—two to three times the rate of people without cancer. This, too, varied by cancer type. While 55% of those with lung cancer, 38% of those with colon cancer and 37% of those with blood cancers died, people with prostate cancer (20%) or breast cancer (14%) had relatively lower mortality.

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