



Coronavirus & Cancer Treatment Frequently Asked Questions

An information sheet for consumers and the community

What is a novel coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Novel coronavirus is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans. The virus causes the respiratory disease known as COVID-19 (COroNaVirus Disease 2019). Symptoms include fever, coughing, a sore throat and shortness of breath. The virus can spread from person to person, but good hygiene can prevent infection.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The common signs include a fever (37.3°C or higher), cough, sore throat, fatigue, or shortness of breath.

If you have any of these symptoms, phone your doctor or state health service immediately and seek advice.

What can I do to protect myself?

To protect yourself and others from infection practice good hand and respiratory hygiene including:

- Clean your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rubs.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or flexed elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid contact with anyone who has symptoms such as fever, a cough, sore throat, fatigue, and shortness of breath.
- If you have to go out to buy groceries or medicine, stay at least 1.5 metres away from others, and especially anyone who has symptoms.
- Stay home and follow the advice of authorities.

How could I become infected with novel coronavirus?

Novel coronavirus is transmitted from person to person, usually when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

If you begin to exhibit any symptoms such as fever, a cough, sore throat, fatigue, and breathing difficulties, then you should contact your GP or call your local or state health authority.

Are men impacted by prostate cancer more at risk of novel coronavirus?

People of all ages can be affected by the novel coronavirus. However, elderly people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill.

Prostate cancer survivors and men undergoing treatment for prostate cancer may have a higher than average risk and it's vitally important to minimise your risks of exposure to COVID-19.

Your individual vulnerability will depend on a range of factors such as your overall health and well-being, your age, your environment, your genes, and any other health conditions.

If you have any questions about your susceptibility, call your GP and ask about how to manage your personal risks, and keep following the advice of health authorities.



Should I stop my prostate cancer treatment?

It's important to follow the medical advice of your doctor and specialists.

Always follow the advice of your doctor and treatment team and seek a second opinion if you have doubts. While your treatment schedule may change slightly due to the Coronavirus pandemic, it is vitally important to follow expert medical advice.

Will my treatment go ahead as planned?

The availability of cancer treatment services will be different for different hospitals and treatment centres. People with life-threatening conditions will still be recommended for treatment and all hospitals and treatment clinics will take steps to make sure necessary drugs are still available. If you have prostate cancer, your doctor or specialist will discuss any delays or changes to your treatment with you, so that you can agree on the best course of action.

Cancer treatment can increase your risk of getting infections, which could put you at risk of COVID-19. In some cases, it may not be safe for you to continue with your current treatment plan and a new one should be developed in consultation with your doctor. Attending hospital for cancer treatment could also put you at risk of COVID-19 and therefore it may be advisable to develop a revised treatment plan that can be delivered outside the hospital setting. It's important to talk to your doctor and discuss any treatment decisions so that you understand your options. Remember that any changes will not be long-term and cancer treatment services will return to normal once the health system has effectively dealt with the Coronavirus pandemic.

What will the delay mean for my cancer?

The majority of prostate cancers grow slowly, which minimises the chances of any delay or change in treatment resulting in adverse outcomes. Whenever possible, treatment will go ahead for life-threatening cancers. Discuss your individual concerns with your doctor and seek their advice. In terms of regular check-ups, these can now be provided over the phone, to avoid visiting the hospital or your doctor's clinic. Before attending your routine cancer check-up, call your doctor or hospital to ask how to proceed.

Will I be able to have prostate cancer surgery?

Men with localised prostate cancer often elect to undergo radical prostatectomy, to remove cancer that is contained within the prostate. Men with locally advanced prostate cancer may also have the option of a radical prostatectomy. Because your risks of contracting COVID-19 will be higher if you undergo surgery and attend hospital, your doctor and treatment team may recommend hormone therapy to stop your cancer from growing until the risk of Coronavirus has been reduced so that you can have surgery.

The good news is that all kinds of radical prostatectomy procedures – such as robotic-assisted, keyhole by surgeon, and open surgery – are all viable after hormone therapy. It's important to discuss your options with your doctor and specialist. Keep in mind that the majority of localised prostate cancers are slow growing and will not be life-threatening. Undergoing hormone therapy before your surgery is not likely to impact the effectiveness of the surgery in the long term. For more aggressive cancers, the treatment and surgical options may vary, and will be determined based on a range of risks, including your risk of contracting COVID-19. Your doctor and treatment team will be able to provide you with expert guidance and recommendations to support your treatment decisions.

Will my radiotherapy continue?

Men being treated with radiation therapy may experience immunodeficiency, which could place you at higher risk of Coronavirus, depending on the nature of the radiation treatment. You are more likely to experience immunodeficiency if the radiation is targeted at the bone, which is normally only used in cases of advanced prostate cancer. Your individual immunity will also depend on a range of other factors, such as other health conditions, genetics, age, and your overall health.



Many men undergo external beam radiotherapy for localised and locally advanced prostate cancer. External beam radiotherapy is also used to relieve symptoms in men with advanced prostate cancer. Attending a hospital or treatment centre could increase your risks of COVID-19 and your doctor and treatment team may therefore recommend a change in treatment while we deal with the pandemic.

Your doctor or treatment team may suggest hormone therapy as an option for you. If you're having radiotherapy to treat localised or locally advanced prostate cancer, it's quite normal to have hormone therapy for up to six months first. This helps to reduce the size of the cancer, making it easier to treat. In most circumstances, your hormone therapy should be able to continue without interruption. [Click here](#) for more detailed information about understanding hormone therapy.

If you do need to delay or change your radiotherapy because of the Coronavirus pandemic, your doctor and treatment team will work with you to decide on the best options for controlling your cancer and reducing any symptoms until such time as your radiation therapy resumes.

Does steroid use for prostate cancer increase your risk of coronavirus?

Steroids can affect your immunity and place you at a higher risk of infection. Your risk level will depend on your dosage and the type of steroids you have been prescribed. In most cases, prostate cancer is treated with a low dose, which minimises your immunodeficiency, but it's important to talk to your doctor and treatment team about your individual risk factors and treatment options. If you've been prescribed a low dose of steroids as part of your chemotherapy treatment, the chemotherapy will make you more vulnerable to Coronavirus and the disease caused by Coronavirus, COVID-19. It's imperative to follow the advice of health authorities and your doctor and minimise your exposure to others who may be infectious.

If you develop a fever or signs of infection, phone your doctor or nearest hospital immediately.

If you have been prescribed a higher dose of steroids, your risk of infections will increase. Talk to your doctor about your risks and be sure to minimise your contact with others by staying home unless you need to go out for essential supplies or services.

I have a routine PSA test – will this still go ahead?

Your regular PSA tests will most likely continue as normal, depending on the impacts of Coronavirus for doctors and health services in your local area. If you are on hormone therapy and responding well, your doctor may recommend you have your PSA test in a six-month timeframe instead of every three months, until such time as the pandemic is under control. Talk to your doctor about what's best for you. In terms of getting the PSA blood test, your clinic or pathology lab may have a new protocol in place to maintain a safe physical distance between patients – it's important to follow the instructions of your treatment teams. If you are self-isolating or in quarantine, phone your doctor or state health service to ask about getting a blood test done at home. If your hospital normally does your blood tests, call the hospital to discuss your Coronavirus risks and options.

What else can I do to lower my risks of COVID-19?

If you are a smoker, quit immediately. Maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet, avoid or minimise alcohol consumption, keep a healthy weight, and ensure you get enough sleep and daily physical activity.

If you need support, we're here to help!

If you need support, reach out via 1800 22 00 99 or email enquiries@pcfa.org.au.

To support PCFA nurses caring for Australian men and their families in the fight against Coronavirus and prostate cancer, [click here](#) to become a Blue Hero!