

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and CLL patients

Statement of the CLL Advocates Network

Date: 25 March 2020

[CLL Advocates Network](#) is closely monitoring the strategies being implemented in various countries to manage the COVID-19 virus. Much of the information about COVID-19 does not address the concerns of people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL). With this statement, we wish to fill this gap and provide extra advice for CLL patients.

Most resources agree that the following individuals are at increased risk of severe or fatal COVID-19:

- Older adults (60+ yrs.)
- Individuals with coexisting chronic illnesses (e.g. chronic lung or heart diseases)
- People contracting secondary infections

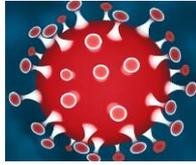
The following are at high risk of severe or fatal COVID-19:

- Immunosuppressed individuals

CLL patients - whether treated or not, young or old - are immune depressed. Treatment can add to the immune deficiency. In view of the foregoing, CLL patients are therefore at high risk of getting COVID-19 and having more severe symptoms than the general population.

Since there are no specific anti-viral medications or vaccines for COVID-19, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the Coronavirus that is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person via cough, sneezes or hand contact. Here are some commonly admitted rules to be followed by all citizens – young and old, healthy or ill – to reduce exposure risk:

1. Avoid close contact with others (keep distance of min. 1.5, ideally 2 meters).
2. No hugging, kissing, or shaking hands. Move away from people before coughing or sneezing.
3. Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, or mouth) with unwashed hands.



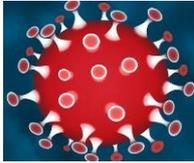
4. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol may also be used but is less preferable.
5. Strictly follow social-distancing measures.
6. Sneezing and coughing into your arm/elbow. In case of blowing nose, use a tissue and immediately trash the tissue.
7. Avoid traveling.
8. Work from home if possible.

CLL patients are urged to be extremely cautious and to strictly follow the restrictive measures suggested by health authorities of their respective countries, in order to avoid the risk of contamination and to prevent the spread of infection. The UK strongly advises those with very serious conditions (this includes “people with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia”) to stay at home for the next 12 weeks commencing 21 March and to keep apart from the general population (“shielding”).

With regards to the questions whether cancer patients should defer, delay or continue their treatment as usual, the German Society of Haematology and Oncology (DGHO) observes that effective treatment of cancer is more important to patient survival than excessive precautionary measures against the new Corona virus such as treatment interruption or delay in treatment, emphasizing that patients whose disease is controlled by a specific therapy usually experience fewer infections than patients who are not treated effectively. Therefore, for most patients with acute cancer, the benefit of sensible and planned cancer therapy outweighs the risk of a possible coronavirus infection. Depending on your drug and individual situation, your treating haematologist may recommend deferring or delaying treatment if he/she feels it is in your best interest.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE CLL AND CONTRACT CORONAVIRUS OR COVID-19?

1. If you have symptoms compatible with COVID-19 or have been in close contact with a coronavirus infected person, follow your country-specific procedure (perhaps a dedicated call centre).
2. Inform your haematologist/oncologist by phone or email or fax (don't come to the hospital on your own to protect healthcare providers and other fragile hospitalized patients or outpatients).
3. Don't stop your treatment unless your haematologist or oncologist asks you to do so, but ask your haematologist to contact the team taking care of you in case of confirmed COVID-19 as adjustment may be needed.



DESPITE ISOLATION, YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

Stay in touch with family and friends by phone or online, and watch out for virtual offering to engage with your local support group.

As most CLL patients, you might have experienced protective isolation in the course of your disease. Being cut off from the outside world certainly poses a challenge, but you have managed this in the past, and will manage it again. Probably this is a good time to give courage and strength to others who are less experienced with isolation!

INFORM AND KEEP INFORMED

News and recommendations are changing quickly so watch for further updates from authoritative sources.

For further information, please refer to the reliable sources of COVID-19 information below.

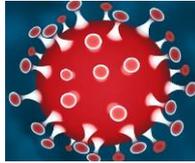
PLEASE HELP US

- Inform immune compromised patients of the risk COVID-19 represents to them.
- Advocate and raise awareness with your local government and healthcare providers.
- Remind your local Health Policy decision makers and other stakeholders of the high risk patients with haematological malignancies.
- Make sure your local authorities and other stakeholders are aware that it is not just the older population that is affected by COVID-19, but also younger adults are falling seriously ill from Coronavirus.
- Share best practices.

Tag us on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#)! And most importantly: keep safe!

Your *CLL Advocates Network Team*

Contact us at info@ccladvocates.net



Sources:

Information for high-risk persons:

World Health Organization (WHO) <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

Public Health England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

US Center for Disease Control

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

Government of Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/vulnerable-populations-covid-19.html>

German DGHO (German Society of Haematology and Oncology)

<https://www.dgho.de/aktuelles/news/news/2020/coronavirus-covid-19-bei-krebspatienten>

Onkopedia (a guideline portal for practising doctors in Germany)

<https://www.onkopedia.com/de/onkopedia/guidelines/coronavirus-infektion-covid-19-bei-patienten-mit-blut-und-krebserkrankungen/@@guideline/html/index.html>

CLL specific sites:

CLL Support Association

<https://www.clisupport.org.uk/coronavirus/>

CLL Society

<https://cllsociety.org/covid-19/>

UK CLL Forum

<http://www.ukcllforum.org/>

Other cancer sites:

Bloodwise

<https://bloodwise.org.uk/blog/coronavirus-and-blood-cancer>

One Cancer Voice

https://bloodwise.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/one_cancer_voice_advice_on_coronavirus_for_people_with_cancer.pdf