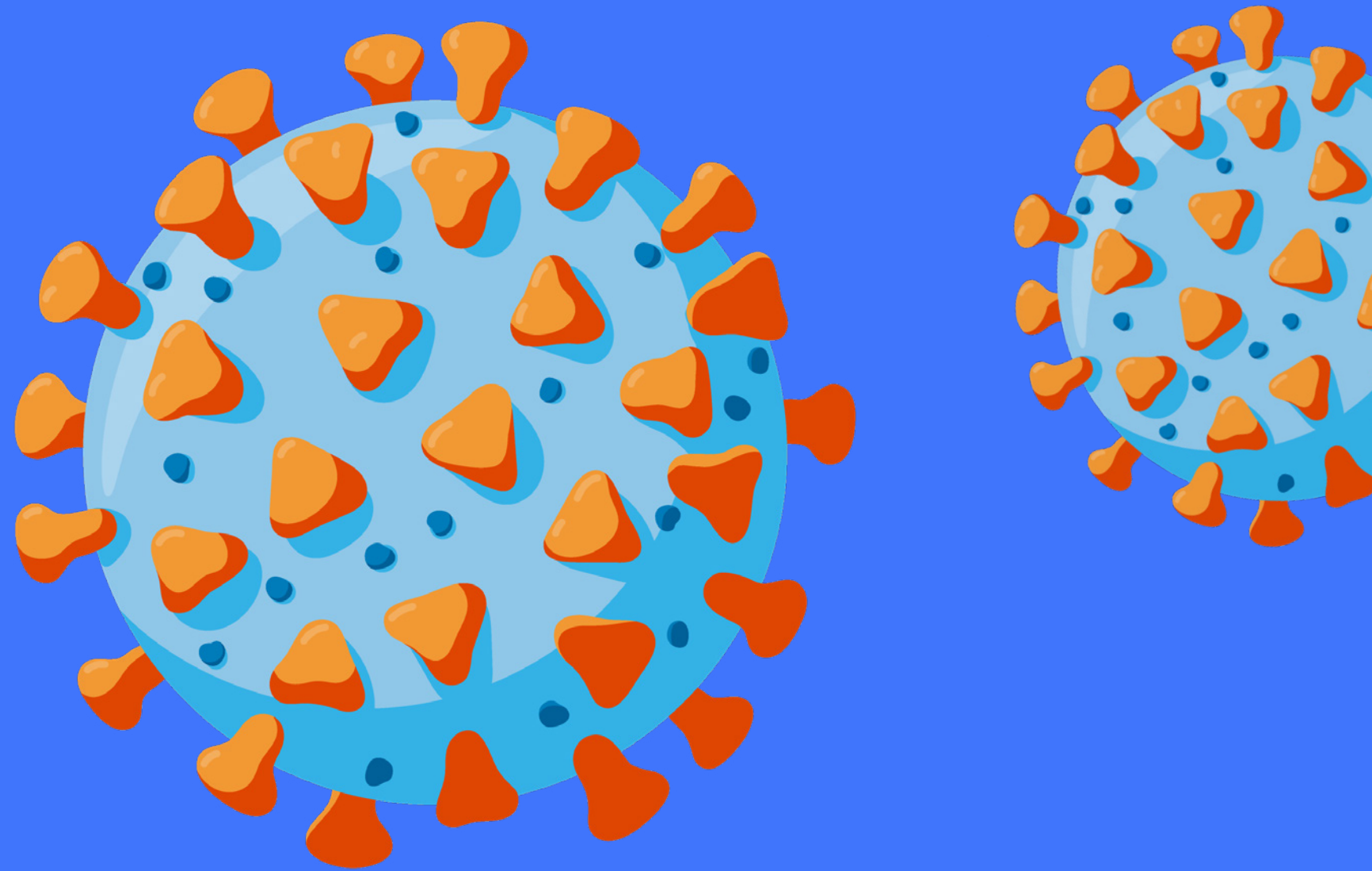


**MSK Direct**

# A COVID-19 Guide for Cancer Patients, Survivors, and Caregivers

A guide to navigating cancer in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.



Memorial Sloan Kettering  
Cancer Center

# Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) is committed to helping cancer patients, cancer survivors, and their caregivers stay safe, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SSEHP has partnered with MSK Direct to bring you comprehensive and actionable information about COVID-19 and cancer that aligns with recommendations from public health organizations.

These are unprecedented and difficult times, but there are steps you can take to protect yourself, your family, and your community while reducing stress and anxiety.

To reach MSK Direct, call the SSEHP dedicated phone line at **833-825-4563** (US) or **646-449-1533** (International).



# What Is a Coronavirus?

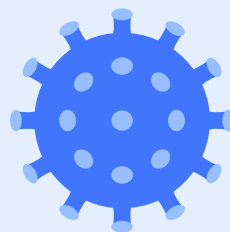
Coronaviruses got their name because each viral structure is surrounded by a “corona,” or halo under electron microscopic examination.

**COVID-19 is a virus that causes mild to severe breathing problems. It can cause serious problems, especially in older people and people with other health problems, including cancer.**

## How does it spread?



- Through droplets when a person with it coughs, sneezes or talks close to another person



## What are the signs of COVID-19?



- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

*Most people who contract the virus will experience mild symptoms and can recover at home. If you or a family member develop severe symptoms, get medical attention immediately.*

## How can I protect myself?



- Wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.



- Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands, and consider wearing a mask in public settings.



- Stay at home when you are sick.



- Practice social distancing by staying at least six feet apart from others.



# Are There Special Concerns for People with Cancer?

People with cancer often have weakened immune systems. Having a weak immune system makes it harder for the body to fight off diseases. If you have cancer, it's important for you and your family members to closely follow steps to protect yourself, especially when it comes to frequent handwashing.

We recommend you speak with your doctor if you have concerns about your risk for COVID-19 being higher as a result of current or past cancer treatment.

**[Click here for more information on how to safely manage COVID-19 symptoms at home.](#)**



# What Do Cancer Patients Undergoing Treatment Need to Know?

Depending on the individual care plan, your healthcare team may recommend the following:

- Engaging in telemedicine appointments to monitor your health remotely.
- Using oral cancer medication(s) that can be sent to your home.
- Rescheduling appointments to a later date once the risk for contracting COVID-19 has been minimized.

Before going in for a visit, talk to your health care provider about suggested precautions to protect yourself.



# What Should I Do if I'm Currently an MSK Patient?

- MSK inpatient and outpatient clinical locations remain open and our clinicians are working diligently to provide essential cancer treatment.
- For the health and safety of our patients and staff, some appointments may be rescheduled. MSK is also using telemedicine to deliver care to you in the convenience of your home. If you have an upcoming appointment, a staff member from your MSK doctor's office will contact you in the days leading up to your visit.
- Before your appointment at MSK, please review updated screening, mask, and visitor policies [here](#).



# I've Just Been Diagnosed with Cancer and Need to Get Treatment. How Can MSK Direct help me or a loved one?

- If you would like to explore treatment options from MSK, call the SSEHP dedicated phone line at **833-825-4563** (US) or **646-449-1533** (International).
- You'll be introduced to a Care Advisor, oncology nurse and/ or social worker who can offer you personalized guidance and support.
- We are working diligently to minimize the impact on our patients, but there may be delays in response times as we work to address the COVID-19 outbreak.





# Changes to Visitor Policies

In response to the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 and following health advisories issued by the New York and New Jersey State Departments of Health, most hospitals have updated their visitor policy and continue to make changes on an ongoing basis.

We know that these are difficult times for patients and their families. We encourage you to stay connected with your loved ones while receiving care.

**[Click here for more details on MSK's visitor policy.](#)**





# Caring for Someone with Cancer and COVID-19... from a Distance

Staying physically distant from your loved one may be the most loving action you can take right now.

Practice these strategies to stay connected and involved:



- Use technology to remind your loved one that you are here for them and they are not alone.
- Compile a list of questions that you and your loved one can ask their doctor.
- Create a concrete communication plan by clarifying the frequency and mode of communication between the patient and providers.
- Help ensure your loved one's needs are met including food, hygiene and prescription needs.
- Complete a healthcare proxy form with your loved one so you can make decisions on their behalf should they become unable to do so. Download healthcare proxy forms from any state at [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org).

**[Click here for more information on how care for a loved one with COVID-19.](#)**

# How Do I Manage Stress and Anxiety Caused by COVID-19?

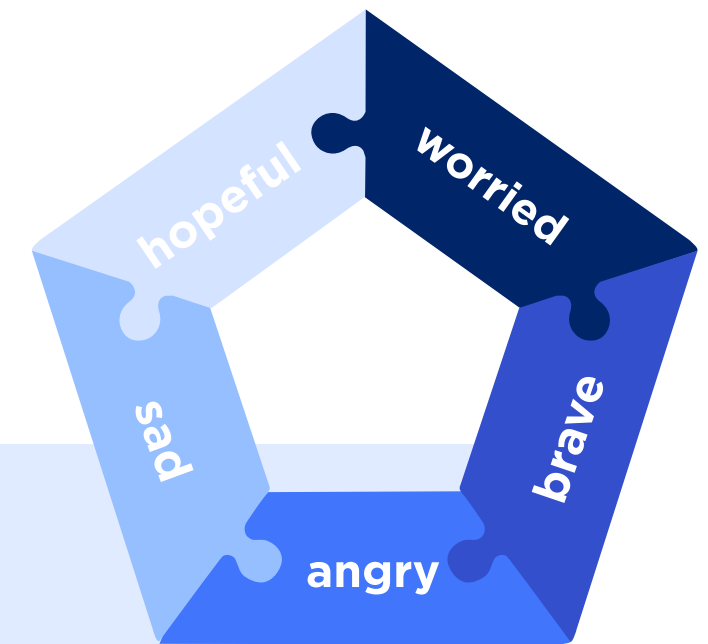
It's reasonable to feel anxious, sad, or angry about COVID-19, especially if you or your loved one has cancer.

- Stay connected by scheduling calls with family and friends.
- Disconnect from the news when you need a break.
- Keep a routine to maintain normalcy. This could look like waking up around the same time every day, getting dressed, eating regular meals and maintaining your bedtime.
- Start a new hobby that will help relax you.
- Exercise daily to reduce stress. Learn how to stay active during social distancing.
- Try relaxation techniques. Click [\*\*here\*\*](#) to listen to free guided meditations or try acupressure offered by MSK's Integrative Medicine Service.
- Get emotional support. Your workplace and state may have free or reduced-rate counseling resources.



# How Should I Talk to Children about Cancer and COVID-19?

It's challenging to share difficult information with the children in your life whether it's about cancer, COVID-19, or other distressing news. The key: share your mixed emotions to help your children express theirs. Here are some other tips to navigate these conversations:



- Prepare yourself by ensuring you are in a quiet space
- Find out what your child knows by asking them questions.
- Use simple, concrete language.
- Be open and honest to encourage trust, and acknowledge what you don't know.
- Prepare for a range of responses.
- Help children feel more in control by brainstorming ways they can stay healthy:
  - hand washing, eating well, getting sleep
  - help connect with loved ones and friends using technology

For more specific guidance on how to talk to children about cancer, visit MSK's [\*\*Talking with Children About Cancer\*\*](#) and [\*\*FAQs\*\*](#).



# How Do I Stay Up to Date on the Latest Developments about COVID-19?

Continue checking the MSK patient portal, MyMSK, if you are an MSK patient.

Learn more by visiting the Coronavirus pages of the CDC website and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene website.

**Stay in Contact with Your Healthcare Team. We will get through this together.**

