

COVID-19 VACCINE AND PATIENTS WITH CANCER:

Frequently Asked Questions

WHEN WILL UAB MEDICINE OFFER THE COVID-19 VACCINE TO PATIENTS?

UAB Medicine is following the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) Vaccination Plan. High-risk patients, including those with cancer, will be offered the vaccine in Phase 1c of the plan. Those currently eligible for vaccine in Alabama are healthcare providers, nursing home residents, law enforcement officers, firefighters and persons age 75 and older. Beginning February 8, people 65 or older and additional groups of critical workers became eligible to get the vaccine. For more information, please visit <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/covid19vaccine>.

We are working closely with the ADPH and will make sure that UAB Medicine patients are notified and given the chance to receive a vaccine once they are eligible, according to the ADPH Vaccination Plan.

We will communicate directly with patients through our website, social media, and the myUABMedicine Patient Portal once the vaccine becomes more widely available. Please speak to your care team about any questions or concerns you may have related to your cancer or treatment.

ARE THE VACCINES SAFE FOR PATIENTS WITH CANCER AND CANCER SURVIVORS?

The available COVID-19 vaccines were approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as safe and effective for use. The benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine are expected to far outweigh the known and potential risks for patients with cancer. There is limited information on the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines in patients with cancer, but there is nothing that suggests that the vaccine poses a greater risk to these patients, including those undergoing treatment.

UAB Medicine will continue to carefully review the latest science on the COVID-19 vaccines before making recommendations to our patients with cancer or offering the vaccine to these patients. Please know that we are giving careful consideration to our patients with cancer, as many have weakened immune systems or are receiving treatment that may weaken their immune system.

We share our vaccine recommendations directly with patients once recommendations have been finalized. Every cancer and treatment plan is different, so it is important to talk to your cancer care team about specific guidance related to your care once a vaccine is available to you.

SHOULD CAREGIVERS OF PEOPLE WITH CANCER GET THE VACCINE?

We encourage everyone who is eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine, especially those living with and/or caring for vulnerable people, such as those with cancer. Caregivers will be offered the vaccine based on their eligibility, as outlined by the ADPH Vaccination Plan, and whether or not they also meet other requirements in the plan. The ADPH Vaccination Plan does not have a defined phase for caregivers of people with cancer.

Please note that it is recommended that people with cancer and their caregivers continue to wear masks, practice social distancing, and wash their hands often, even after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

DOES THE VACCINE MAKE ME IMMUNE TO THE VIRUS OR JUST REDUCE THE SYMPTOMS?

COVID-19 vaccines are being carefully studied in research trials and are only authorized or approved by the FDA if they make it much less likely that you will get COVID-19. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were shown to prevent COVID-19 symptoms in people who received one, compared to those who did not receive a vaccine. Experts believe that getting a COVID-19 vaccine may help keep you from getting seriously ill from COVID-19 by boosting your immune system. Experts continue to study the effects of the vaccines on the severity of illness from COVID-19, as well as the vaccines' ability to keep people from spreading the virus that causes COVID-19.

WILL I STILL NEED TO WEAR A MASK IF I HAVE RECEIVED BOTH DOSES OF THE VACCINE?

Yes. Wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, and washing your hands often are still important after receiving the vaccine. There will be a limited supply of the vaccines at first, and because people will be vaccinated in phases, it will take time to vaccinate enough of the population to stop the spread of COVID-19. Also, it is not known how long immunity will last in people who have received both doses of the vaccine. So, it may be possible to become infected after vaccination, though it is likely that any symptoms would be less severe.

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccines and how they relate to your care at UAB Medicine, please visit uabmedicinevaccine.org.

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) & CANCER CARE AT UAB MEDICINE

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. WHAT SHOULD PATIENTS WITH CANCER DO TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM COVID-19?

Cancer treatment may weaken the immune system. The immune system helps fight off infections. Cancer patients are among those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. UAB Medicine encourages cancer patients to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for people who need to take extra precautions. These recommendations can be found [here](#).

2. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO COVID-19 OR HAVE POSSIBLE SYMPTOMS?

You have several options for testing if you think you may have COVID-19. You may call the 24/7 Alabama COVID-19 hotline at 1-888-264-2256 for testing site locations and the hours of operation of those locations. In partnership with the Jefferson County Department of Health, UAB also has opened an appointment-based testing center, which is open Sunday - Friday from 9 am to 11:15 am.

Patients experiencing COVID-19 symptoms may call 205-975-1881 for screening between 7 am and 5 pm. If patients meet the screening requirements, they will be provided an appointment time at UAB's drive-through testing center. **Patients must have an appointment to be tested.**

Furthermore, please use UAB Medicine's [symptom tracker](#) at HelpBeatCOVID19.org to report your health status and symptoms, even if you are feeling healthy and especially if you have any underlying medical conditions like cancer, diabetes, or heart disease. Logging your symptoms daily will help us serve you better and provide insight on tracking COVID-19 in our community.

3. HOW SHOULD I PROCEED WITH MY CANCER CARE IF I HAVE CONFIRMED OR SUSPECTED COVID-19?

If you have an upcoming cancer appointment or other outpatient appointment at UAB Medicine and you have confirmed or suspected COVID-19, please do not come to UAB unless you receive special instructions from your UAB care team. **Instead, please call the UAB Cancer Line at 205-801-9034 prior to your appointment for instructions. Your health and safety is our top priority.**

If you are experiencing a true medical emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. **For non-emergency urgent care – if you have COVID-19 or think you've been exposed to it – please DO NOT go to the emergency room or come to UAB Medicine outpatient clinics for any reason.** Instead, please contact your primary care doctor or call UAB HealthFinder at 205-934-9999 or toll-free at 1-800-822-8816 for instructions.

4. SHOULD I BE WEARING A FACE MASK?

The CDC recommends that you wear a face mask or cloth face covering when you may be in close contact with others. Please understand that wearing a covering or mask is not a substitute for social distancing. It is still very important to stay at least 6 feet away from others.

To comply with CDC guidelines, all UAB Medicine employees, patients, and visitors are required to wear a mask or face covering inside and outside all UAB Medicine facilities.

To preserve our limited supply of masks for medical care providers, we ask that patients and visitors arrive wearing their own mask or face covering. These can be cloth masks, scarfs, or commercially made masks. There are several easy ways to make masks at home, including options that do not require sewing.

More information on UAB Medicine's Masking Policy, in addition to instructions for making your own cloth face mask, including sewn and no-sew versions, can be found [here](#).

5. WHAT IS UAB DOING TO PROTECT ITS CANCER PATIENTS AND STAFF?

UAB Medicine cares for patients with complex health conditions, so we have expertise in infection prevention and control and in treating patients with infections. We are working hard to make sure that staff, patients, and their families are protected during this time. All employees, patients, and visitors are required to wear a mask or face covering inside and outside all UAB Medicine facilities, and we are screening all patients, visitors, and employees at the entrances for possible fever symptoms. Also, we have made changes to the waiting areas and elevators to promote social distancing. Finally, the UAB Environmental Services team is working around the clock to make sure our facilities are disinfected and remain clean for everyone.

6. WILL CANCER PATIENTS BE SAFE IN THE HOSPITAL OR CLINICS WHILE UAB MEDICINE IS TREATING COVID-19 PATIENTS?

UAB Medicine is doing everything possible to keep our patients safe during this time. Specific measures have been taken to isolate patients who have tested positive for COVID-19 or are suspected of having the virus. This applies to our inpatient hospital units and our outpatient clinics in The Kirklin Clinic.

7. HOW WILL I KNOW IF MY APPOINTMENT NEEDS TO BE RESCHEDULED OR CANCELLED?

For patients receiving cancer treatments such as infusion or radiation therapy, UAB Medicine is here to serve you and your treatment needs.

If you have an upcoming cancer-related appointment, please proceed with your scheduled appointment as usual. If modifications have been made to your scheduled appointment, please expect your care team to contact you by phone, mail, or Patient Portal message prior to your appointment. If you have questions related to an upcoming appointment, please call the UAB Cancer Line at 205-801-9034.

If you have an upcoming in-person visit to UAB Medicine, please follow this [link](#) to learn more about our policies on masks, visitors, and cleaning. Please contact your cancer care team for more information related to your specific treatment.

8. I HAVE TO DRIVE A LONG DISTANCE TO UAB FOR MY CANCER APPOINTMENT. IS IT SAFE TO VISIT IN PERSON, OR ARE THERE REMOTE ALTERNATIVES?

UAB Medicine is doing everything possible to keep our patients safe during this time. If you have an upcoming in-person visit to UAB Medicine, please know that we are screening all patients, visitors, and employees at the entrances for possible fever symptoms. Also, we have made changes to the waiting areas and elevators to promote social distancing.

If you have questions related to an upcoming appointment, or would like to discuss remote alternatives to care, please call the UAB Cancer Line at 205-801-9034.

9. I NEED TO TRAVEL TO UAB MEDICINE TO PARTICIPATE IN A CANCER CLINICAL TRIAL. IS IT STILL SAFE TO DO SO?

Patients enrolled in cancer clinical trials should contact your cancer care team for information related to your specific clinical trial.

10. I HEARD THAT UAB MEDICINE IS LIMITING THE NUMBER OF VISITORS AT ITS HOSPITAL AND CLINIC LOCATIONS. DOES THIS APPLY TO APPOINTMENTS FOR CANCER CARE?

For the safety of our staff, patients, and their families, UAB Medicine has implemented strict visitation guidelines at our hospital and clinic locations. This includes limitations on the number of visitors who can accompany patients on their visits. If you are a cancer patient receiving infusion therapy at The Kirklin Clinic, please note that no visitors are allowed to accompany you into the infusion bay. If you are a cancer patient who needs special assistance, **only one** caregiver may accompany you to your visit. Both you and your caregiver must wear a mask to your visit and practice social distancing while in the waiting area, remaining at least 6 feet from those around you.

11. WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT QUESTIONS RELATED TO MY MEDICATIONS?

The UAB Medicine Nursing Call Center is still here to answer any questions related to your cancer care, including questions about your prescription medications or therapies. The nursing staff is trained to assist you with pain, nausea, vomiting, and other side effects that may arise during your treatment. The nursing staff is available to you by phone or in person during any of your treatment visits and can be reached at 205-801-8415.

For some of our cancer patients, your Cancer Navigation Team may also contact you with guidance during this time.

12. AS A CANCER PATIENT OR FAMILY MEMBER, I AM FEELING DOWN, UNCERTAIN, AND STRESSED AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC. WHAT CAN I DO TO FIND SUPPORT AND KEEP MYSELF EMOTIONALLY WELL?

UAB Medicine is still offering psychology oncology counseling services via telehealth. If you or a loved one is in need of support services, please call the Supportive Care Clinic at 205-801-8624 to schedule a phone or video visit with our trained psychology oncology professionals. This service is available Monday through Friday from 8 am to 5 pm at no cost to patients and caregivers.

For some people, spiritual resources or faith can serve as a source of strength, support, and comfort. UAB Medicine Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy services are still available for your spiritual needs. Our dedicated Pastoral Care staff are offering several unique services during this time of social distancing and isolation. A prepared list of resources for meditation can be found online [here](#).

You may also email a prayer request to chaplains@uab.edu with “Prayer Request” in the subject line. Those who submit a prayer request will receive an email within 24 hours from one of our chaplains with a written prayer in response.

13. ARE COMMUNITY OUTREACH EFFORTS CONTINUING DURING THIS TIME?

Yes, community outreach and engagement efforts continue, even as physical offices are closed. Team members from the O’Neal Comprehensive Cancer Center at UAB’s Office of Community Outreach & Engagement continue to provide guidance and outreach to our service areas via phone, email, and the Cancer Center [website](#). Our community health advisors remain on duty in their home counties to provide up-to-date information about ongoing efforts and developments regarding the current health emergency.

14. WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW COVID-19 MAY IMPACT MY CANCER AND TREATMENT?

For more information on UAB Medicine’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and your care at UAB, please visit uabmedicine.org/coronavirus.

For more information on UAB Medicine’s policies on masks, visitors, and cleaning, please visit uabmedicine.org/visiting-uab-medicine-in-person.

We encourage you to stay updated on the latest COVID-19 news and recommendations from the CDC, found [here](#).

For cancer-specific resources and updates on the COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage you to visit the American Cancer Society [website](#).