

Cancerworld

COVID-19: ECCO demands attention to protect cancer patients

Editorial Staff / 17 March 2020

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ECCO
EUROPEAN CANCER ORGANISATION

NEWS: Statement on COVID-19 from the European Cancer Organisation's Board of Directors

'Attention is urgently required to protect cancer patients and preserve Europe's healthcare professional, scientific and patient societies'

17th March 2020

The Board of Directors of the European Cancer Organisation has released the following statement on the ongoing measures being taken across Europe to manage the developing situation connected to the COVID-19 pandemic. The statement gives particular attention to the growing impact of COVID-19 upon the treatment of cancer patients, as well as the impact of the present situation upon the functioning of Europe's scientific, healthcare professional education and patient association sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a significant threat for cancer patients, which deserve to be protected through immediate action on several levels all over Europe, [according to a statement](#) published today by the European Cancer Organisation (ECCO).

Matti Aapro, President of the European Cancer Organisation, referred specifically to the shortage of materials that are key to delivering quality of care to patients: "This includes reports of shortages of face masks, respiratory devices and sanitising product. Resolving these shortages must be at the highest level of attention for all governmental structures for pandemic management at this time" he said.



The statement on COVID-19 is addressed to the public, to national governments and to the European Union at all levels.

Citizens are invited to take their personal responsibilities very seriously: "Every one of us has a responsibility to each other to respect official advice at this time" reads the document. "COVID-19 is a test of our abilities as individuals, organisations and countries to cooperate and share information with each other effectively. We urge all to continue to rise to this challenge."

This can also help protect persons who are particularly vulnerable, like older people with underlying health conditions such as chronic lung disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and cancer that is not cured or in remission.

ECCO's document lists specific cases:

- People having chemotherapy, or who have received chemotherapy in the last 3 months;
- People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer;
- People having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors;
- People having intensive (radical) radiotherapy for lung cancer;
- People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs;
- People with some types of blood cancer which damage the immune system, even if they have not needed treatment (for example, chronic leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma).

National and European decision-makers are responsible for addressing the shortage of core materials needed for providing sustained, safe and high quality cancer care: "This includes face masks, respiratory support devices and some sanitising products, such as hand disinfectant. For the present time, we understand that where such shortage situations are occurring, health systems are creating means of managing the situation by redistribution of such supplies from lower risk settings to priority areas, such as intensive care and oncology units. However" the statement reads "any further diminishment of supply threatens to considerably compromise quality of care for cancer patients and others".

For cancer patients who are undergoing active treatment (chemotherapy, radiation or surgery) and who known to be at an elevated risk for complications from the COVID-19 infection, the European Cancer Organisation demands that the following procedures are put in place as soon as possible:

- Prompt screening of patients in care for COVID-19;

- Rigorous implementation of guidelines across the health system in respect to such matters as quarantining and maintenance of high standards in hygiene;
- Continuous, clear and high quality communication to healthcare professionals and the public about the ongoing situation.

ECCO also calls for support “to preserve the vital educational activity of Europe’s scientific, healthcare professional and patient association sector in the wake of the major disruption being prompted by COVID-19”, which might be attenuated through targeted relief measures for economic redress.

The [European Cancer Organisation](#) is an umbrella federation of 28 European and international level societies working with 17 patient advocacy organisations to improve cancer care and outcomes in all countries.

Read the [full statement](#).