



## IWK Health Centre PEDIATRIC CANCER AND BLOOD DISORDERS IMMUNOCOMPROMISED PATIENTS

### COVID INFORMATION SHEET (May 2021)

The WHO (World Health Organization) declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic in March of 2020. While fewer children have been sick with COVID-19 compared to adults, children can be infected with COVID-19, can get sick from COVID-19, and can spread COVID-19 to others. Although complications are possible, healthy children with confirmed infection typically have mild symptoms.

While generally speaking children who are immune compromised ( eg due to cancer treatment, sickle cell disease) have not developed more severe COVID-19 infection than other children, in rare cases, even healthy children may become quite ill and so it is important to protect yourselves and others from the infection by taking precautionary measures.

Symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose/nasal congestion, new or worsening shortness of breath, and headache. Like most viral respiratory illnesses, individuals with COVID-19 generally recover on their own. There is no specific treatment for COVID-19 in children, although we can manage the symptoms if needed.

The Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA vaccine that protects against COVID-19 is approved in Canada for children > 12 years, and is now available in Nova Scotia. We recommend that children > 12 years, including those who may be immunocompromised, receive the COVID-19 vaccine after discussion with their healthcare team. It is also recommended that children maintain their standard immunizations (including Pneumococcal conjugate 13 and *influenza*) as well.

The following is recommended to everyone to prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- **Wash your hands.** Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds OR use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, particularly after being out in public.
- **Avoid touching your face especially eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands.
- **If you have symptoms that could be COVID-19, self-isolate at home.** Information on self-isolation can be found at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/>
- **If you must go out, wear a face mask.** When you are sick, wearing a face mask helps to stop the spread of germs from you to others. If your mask gets wet or dirty, clean your hands, change it to a new clean mask, and clean your hands again.
- **Cover your coughs and sneezes.** If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or the bend of your elbow, not your hands. Wash your hands right away after you sneeze, cough or touch used tissues or masks.

- **Avoid all non-essential travel.** Information on current travel restrictions in Nova Scotia may be found at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/>
- **Clean and disinfect common areas, and the things everyone touches frequently in your home, once a day.** Although we now know COVID-19 spreads much more easily by face to face (droplet) contact with an infected person and less by touching surfaces, keeping surfaces that are commonly touched in your home clean is always a good idea. Clean surfaces in your house that are touched often, like doorknobs, tv remotes, or faucet handles, with soap and water or regular household cleaners.
- **Avoid contact with people who are sick.** Whether someone you know is sick with COVID-19 or is sick with another virus, it's best not to have contact with them until they recover. People who have symptoms that could be COVID-19 must self-isolate and should have a COVID-19 test. The rest of their household must self-isolate with them until the test result comes back.
- **Avoid large crowds and practice social distancing (do not shake hands, hug or kiss and try to stay 2 meters away from others if you have to go out).** Contact with the people who live in your house with you is ok if they are not experiencing symptoms of being ill, but otherwise, always practice social distancing with others.
- **Get your flu shot.** By protecting yourself from influenza you can decrease the burden on the healthcare system and protect others as well.

**If your child is immunocompromised it is recommended to:**

- **Continue current care:** do not stop any medications without consultation with your medical team, even if you fear becoming immunocompromised and contracting COVID-19. Stopping therapy could potentially make your underlying disease worse.
- **Do not take drugs that are being tested against COVID-19.** These are considered experimental for COVID-19 at this point and may have serious side effects and/or interact with your child's usual medications. Always talk to the medical team about any new medications before taking them.
- **Fill prescriptions:** Try to have at least a 4 week supply of medications. Be in contact with your care team well in advance if you require more medications.
- **Limit exposure:** While full self-isolation is not necessary, it is recommended to limit exposure to groups where infections may spread. This would be the case for all family members of immunocompromised patients wherever possible.
- **If your child is unwell, call the clinic or on call oncologist.** They will instruct you whether or not your child needs assessment and if so where the most appropriate place to go would be.
- **Please do not go to a COVID-19 testing/ assessment center unless directed by the oncologist**

- **Do not delay medical care** due to concern of contracting COVID-19 at hospital. There are many measures in place to prevent this from happening.
- **Proactively develop a plan** that allows for isolation of affected family members if your child or you become sick. Include plans for caregivers for any affected child, as well as a different caregiver for your other children.

**If your immunocompromised child is suspected to have a COVID-19 infection:**

- Please let your FCC know if you suspect your child might have been exposed to COVID-19. They should self-isolate for 14 days. Here is a link on how to do this:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-how-to-isolate-at-home.html>
- If your child is unwell, please call the clinic, or the on call oncologist after hours before going to the Emergency Department.
- If your child has fever, cough or other COVID-19 or viral symptoms, **please call the clinic, or the on call oncologist after hours before coming to the hospital.**
- Remember fever/neutropenia requires rapid assessment and treatment. Your child needs assessment even if it turns out not to be COVID-19.
- If you come to the Emergency Department, please show your Treat Promptly Card. If you have mislaid it, let the triage nurse know that your child is immunocompromised.
- If your child is confirmed to have a COVID-19 infection, they will likely still have mild symptoms and may be able to be managed at home, but it would be essential to work with your medical team to ensure appropriate testing and management.
- Ensure you have a thermometer at home.
- Ensure you have some acetaminophen or ibuprofen at home (do not use ibuprofen unless instructed by your health care team to do so).
- Ensure you have cleaning supplies, hand soap, hand sanitizer, etc. at home.

The IWK website is being updated frequently given the evolving nature of this pandemic. Further information may be obtained from your FCC or found at: <http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/>

**We realize this is a stressful time for you. Please call if you have questions or concerns.**

NOTE: To protect you and our patients, we are limiting visitors to the health centre. Please refer to the [IWK website](#) for the most up to date information: look for Pediatric Outpatient (Ambulatory) Appointments and Pediatric Inpatient. Please respect this number.

Approved by:

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