

Understanding COVID-19/Novel Coronavirus

How to Prepare for and Cope with a Pandemic or Crisis Situation

A pandemic is an outbreak of a new disease on a global scale. When a new disease first arises, most people lack the natural immunity to fight it off. These new diseases, such as the coronavirus (COVID-19), are typically highly contagious and spread from person to person easily. Like a natural disaster, a pandemic or a crisis situation can present many challenges and put those living with a cancer diagnosis at higher risk for infections.

BEFORE A PANDEMIC OR CRISIS

A pandemic or crisis situation can be an uncertain time for many people. However, prevention tips can help you prepare for the spreading of a new disease or a crisis situation.

It's important to pay attention to your local news for any updated laws that are being enforced during a pandemic and any instructions provided by health agencies, primarily the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Updates from the CDC and the WHO provide reliable information on the spread of the disease, including how to protect yourself and your family during the outbreak or crisis.

Lockdowns or quarantines may be required during a pandemic or crisis situation in order to slow down or stop the spread of the disease. If it is possible, keeping the house stocked with at least a 2-week supply of food, water, and essentials would be beneficial.

During a pandemic or a natural disaster, relocating could be a necessary safety measure. If you are relocating, patients should inform their health care team in order to discuss how this will impact treatment and best practices regarding safety measures. If you are relocating, make sure you have a safe mode of transportation. Consider options that will result in the least amount of contact with large crowds, and consult with your health care provider to ensure you have enough medication. If possible, bring important documents like medical records, test results, health care providers' contact information, and insurance records. If you are relocated due to a natural disaster, it could be beneficial to store important documents in a water-resistant bag or container. It may also be beneficial to have an emergency contact person(s) that you can reach and that is also aware of your location in cases of emergency. This way, if anyone wanted to reach you and are not able to do so, they can find you through your emergency contact.

DURING A PANDEMIC OR CRISIS SITUATION

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM INFECTION

Older adults and people living with cancer are typically at a higher risk for infections. The most effective way to avoid infections is to wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds. If water and soap are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. During a pandemic, avoid contact with others to reduce the risk of infections, given the typically contagious nature of the disease. Wearing a face mask and practicing "social distancing" by maintaining at least 6 feet between yourself and others can reduce exposure risk. During a pandemic or natural disaster, the CDC will provide updates and include specific protective measures individuals should take. For a comprehensive list of the best practices to prevent being exposed to COVID-19, read our *Understanding COVID-19/Novel Coronavirus: What Lymphoma Patients Need to Know* fact sheet on our COVID-19 Learning Center site.

MAKE TIME FOR SELF-CARE

Everyone reacts differently during times of crisis. Having feelings of stress, anxiety, fear, or grief are all normal emotions to experience, especially during times of high uncertainty. Feelings can also change over time. It can be helpful to allow yourself the time to learn, feel, and accept whatever those emotions may be for you. While stress, anxiety, and fear are natural reactions during a pandemic or natural disaster, excessive worry is not helpful and can get in the way of doing things that matter to us the most. There are several ways to practice self-care and ultimately work through these challenges.

1. Find control in the uncontrollable

Strive to establish or maintain a routine or structure throughout your day. This should include a combination of work, household, and pleasant activities. Doing so can help create a sense of normalcy, especially when other things may be disrupted. It can also provide you with a sense of predictability, purpose, and control.

2. If possible, include regular physical activity into your routine

There are many different at-home exercise programs and videos that are available on online streaming services. Staying active provides many benefits, such as alleviating breathing problems, constipation, and mild depression. Additionally, it may help reduce stress and fatigue. Talk to your doctor before starting an exercise program and consider visiting a physical therapist for advice.

3. Surround yourself with support

Social distancing does not mean social isolation. In fact, during times of uncertainty, it is even more important to find ways to get *emotional* (someone to listen and validate us), *informational* (someone to provide information we trust), and *practical* (someone to go food shopping for us if we can't) support. Connecting with our family and friends is a vital part of our self-care, so it's important to find alternate ways of having those meaningful interactions. Consider scheduling a virtual social night (e.g., through Zoom or Skype) or an outdoor movie. This support system can also be found through a support group, online message boards, a peer support program, such as the Lymphoma Research Foundation's (LRF's) peer support program, or the Lymphoma Support Network. For more information on LRF's Lymphoma Support Network or other support resources/programs, contact the LRF Helpline at 800-500-9976 or email helpline@lymphoma.org.

4. Minimize the amount of news or media you read/watch/hear

Instead of becoming more informed, the news and social media can serve to increase our worries. Seek factual information from trusted sources, such as the CDC, and do so only once or twice daily for brief periods. Share your plan with your friends so they also limit the amount of updates they provide.

5. Nurture your body

Getting sufficient sleep and a healthy diet are both essential to ensuring our body has the energy it needs to accomplish the things that matter the most to us. While individual sleep needs vary, it's important to get at least 6-10 hours of sleep daily. Medications, stress, poor sleep habits, and lack of exercise can all impact our sleep. If you are having sleep challenges, keep a sleep diary to identify how best to intervene. Many sleep disturbances can be improved with just a few sleep hygiene tips.

6. Be kind to yourself

When facing periods of uncertainty, it's completely normal to worry and feel stressed. Be mindful of how you speak to yourself, and work towards shifting unhelpful thoughts towards ones that generate love, strength, and self-compassion. These adaptive perspectives can help reduce our emotional and

physiological response to stress. Introducing brief mindfulness or other meditative techniques (such as guided imagery) into your daily practice can also help calm your mind and body by deactivating the stress response.



GETTING SUPPORT ONCE THE PANDEMIC OR CRISIS SITUATION RESOLVES

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

Open communication and follow-up with your health care provider is critical during unprecedented times. It's important to ensure you receive the care you need. Request a (telehealth) visit with your provider to review the adjustments that you made to adapt to the pandemic/crisis, and solicit suggestions for how best to move forward. If you relocated, let your health care provider know when or if you plan to return home. Questions you can consider asking your health care provider to begin this conversation include:

- I stopped my treatment because I relocated. I don't know when I'll be back; when or how should I proceed with my treatment?
- I'm not in treatment but am in follow-up care; is telehealth an option?
- Can you refer me to any mental health resources (support group, counselor, therapist, etc.) so I can receive extra support during this challenging time?
- Are there specialized financial assistance programs available?
- What are the best practices to prevent infections?

Resources

LRF offers a wide range of resources that address treatment options, the latest research advances, and ways to cope with all aspects of lymphoma. Our free programs and support services include publications, webinars, podcasts, and limited financial assistance. During a pandemic or health crisis, we encourage patients to refer to the CDC website for updated information. Patients can also call the LRF Helpline at (800) 500-9976 or email helpline@lymphoma.org if they require any additional information or have difficulty navigating the CDC website.

Contact LRF:

Helpline: (800) 500-9976

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The *Understanding Lymphoma* series is published by the Lymphoma Research Foundation (LRF) for the purpose of informing and educating readers. Facts and statistics were obtained using published information, including data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) Program. Because each person's body and response to treatment is different, no individual should self-diagnose or embark upon any course of medical treatment without first consulting with his or her physician. The medical reviewer, the medical reviewer's institution, and LRF are not responsible for the medical care or treatment of any individual.

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