

Although many of these high-risk individuals have taken available steps to boost their protection against COVID-19 infection, they remain quite vulnerable to severe COVID-19. Their modest response to vaccines leaves them at high risk, a status that forces them to live as if they are unvaccinated. That means that they must follow public health strategies, including masking and distancing, to scrupulous detail. This condition leaves them virtual prisoners to the virus, unable to easily see family and friends, travel, or in some circumstances meet the requirements of their employment. Of great concern to us as health care professionals is the challenge that immune compromised patients may face in safely obtaining treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most daunting situations for us is to explain to the newly diagnosed blood cancer patient the risks of initiating treatment during the pandemic, with a primary risk being COVID-19 infection. The ready availability of monoclonal antibody therapy for pre-exposure prophylaxis (and as a complement to vaccination) would ease the path to treatment for the newly diagnosed immune compromised patient. The benefits of monoclonal antibodies for all immune compromised individuals – and not just those newly diagnosed and initiating treatment – are significant and we urge federal action to increase supply and distribution. The development of antiviral small molecule drugs represents another significant advance. The limited supply of these therapies is exacerbated by an inadequate distribution system. In many states there is currently no means of prioritizing access to antivirals. This results in many doses given to individuals with no underlying health issues who benefit from the drugs by shortening the duration of their illness. Few doses are available for the immune compromised population, in which therapy can prove lifesaving. Additional distribution of these drugs to hospitals and cancer centers (in addition to the current allotment sent to retail pharmacies) could ensure allocation of antivirals for immunosuppressed individuals. Coupled with specific, related guidance for the health care providers responsible for their care and safety, these actions would go far to alleviate the severe anxiety and uncertainty that patients and their family experience.

We urge you to take action to remove the challenges that the immune compromised patients face in obtaining monoclonal antibodies and antiviral treatments that are essential to helping them live through the COVID-19 pandemic.

We stand ready to offer our experience, knowledge of the available data about these patients and their COVID-19 experiences, and how we have navigated the pandemic to date. Our relationship with your administration has been collaborative and constructive, and we look forward to our continued work together.

Sincerely,

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