



## Mass General Cancer Center at Newton-Wellesley

### COVID 19 (Coronavirus) Patient Information Bulletin March 13, 2020

#### **What is COVID-19?**

There are many types of coronaviruses, which can cause different types of viral infections. The type of coronavirus in the news right now is the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2 is the virus that causes the disease COVID-19). Individuals with COVID-19 have mild to severe respiratory (breathing) problems.

#### **What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

COVID-19 causes cold or flu-like symptoms. These may include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, body aches, or chills. It can cause serious problems, such as shortness of breath, pneumonia (from the virus), possibly respiratory failure requiring a breathing machine (a type of life support), and even death, especially in older people and people with other health problems. Some people don't experience any symptoms at all but could nonetheless spread the virus to someone else.

#### **Who is at risk of getting sick with COVID-19?**

While anyone can get COVID-19, currently it appears that patients who are older, have suppressed immune systems, or have chronic medical conditions are more likely to experience serious illness with COVID-19.

**We are sending you this information because our records suggest that you have been seen or have an upcoming appointment in the Mass General Cancer Center at Newton-Wellesley. Many patients that receive care here have a condition that may increase the risk of developing severe disease if infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.**

#### **Who is at Higher Risk?**

According to the CDC, early information out of China, where COVID-19 first started, shows that some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. This includes:

- Older adults
- People who have serious chronic medical conditions like:
  - Heart disease
  - Diabetes
  - Lung disease

#### **Are there special concerns for people with cancer?**

People with cancer often have weakened immune systems. Having a weak immune system makes it harder for the body to fight off diseases, so it's important for people with cancer



and their family members to closely follow steps to protect themselves, especially when it comes to frequent handwashing. We recommend you speak with your Mass General Cancer Center at Newton-Wellesley specialist (oncologist, surgeon, or radiation oncologist) or nurse if you have concerns about your risk for COVID-19 being higher because of current or past cancer treatment. Please note that patients on clinical research protocols should consult with their care team with any questions regarding your protocol.

### **If I get exposed to COVID-19, will I develop an infection?**

Not everyone who is exposed to the virus will become infected. And not all of those who are infected will develop symptoms or go on to have severe disease. If symptoms develop, they will occur between 2-14 days after exposure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

### **How is COVID-19 spread?**

- If you are within 6 feet of someone with COVID-19 infection, the infection could spread to you through droplets when the person sneezes or coughs.
- If you touch an object – such as a door handle – that has the COVID-19 virus on it, and then you touch your mouth, nose, or eyes, you can infect yourself.
- If you are helping care for someone with COVID-19 and you are within 6 feet of them when they cough, sneeze.

### **Is COVID-19 spread through the air?**

No. COVID-19 does not travel through the air – other than up to six feet of an infected person as described above.

### **Are there treatments for COVID-19?**

Treatment is supportive. There are no medications available yet that are proven to treat the virus and no vaccination to prevent it. Experimental trials are being developed.

### **How can I protect myself from getting COVID-19?**

- Wash your hands frequently, and in particular after you have been in a public place. Wash for 20 seconds (about as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice). Liquid soap is preferred. As an alternative you can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Do not touch your eyes, mouth, and nose, especially with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people who are ill.
- Avoid crowded public places. As the virus becomes more common in our area, it may be helpful to stay away from public places as much as possible.
- Obtain sufficient food, medications, and other needed items so that you can avoid public places if advised.



- Consider letting people you are socializing with know that you must take extra steps to prevent COVID-19 and ask that they tell you or avoid you if they might have exposure to or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Eat with utensils, not with your hands, and wash your hands before eating
- Avoid shaking hands even in a business setting.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, particularly after coming in from outside or after you have had visitors.

### **Does wearing a mask reduce my risk of becoming infected?**

- Because it is not clear that wearing a mask protects people from becoming infected with viruses, the CDC is not recommending the use of masks.

### **How can people around me prevent the spread of COVID-19?**

- Everyone should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. The tissue should be thrown away and hands washed or sanitized. If a tissue is not available, they should cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve.
- Facemasks should be used by people with symptoms such as cough, sore throat, or fever, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others.

### **Should I avoid travel?**

We encourage all patients to follow the CDC's guidelines, which can be found on its website. At this time, we also recommend that all patients at increased risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 avoid all non-essential travel both domestically and abroad. Travel by public transportation locally may also increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

### **What should I do if I have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 but do not have symptoms?**

There are no available treatments to prevent individuals who have been exposed from becoming ill. However, if you become infected, you could spread COVID-19 to others. You may need to "self-quarantine," staying in your home without leaving for 14 days. Public health authorities will provide instructions regarding any restrictions in your movement.

### **What do I need to do if I am going to an appointment or visiting Mass General Cancer Center at Newton-Wellesley?**

If you have cold or flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, body aches, or chills), please call our office before coming to the Mass General Cancer Center at Newton-Wellesley, even if you have an appointment. We will ask you about your travel history, potential for COVID-19 exposure and your symptoms. If you have been informed that you have recently been exposed to someone who later tested positive for COVID-19, please call our office before coming in.

### **What are policies for visitors to the Mass General Cancer Center at Newton-Wellesley?**



## MASS GENERAL CANCER CENTER at Newton-Wellesley

For your protection, we are currently limiting the number of visitors and/or people coming with you for your visit or inpatient stay to no more than one (1) at a time. If a visitor shows cold or flu-like symptoms, they will be asked to leave.

### **What is Newton-Wellesley Hospital doing to protect patients and visitors?**

At Newton-Wellesley Hospital, we are closely monitoring this situation and have plans in place. Our staff is highly trained at screening for and managing infectious diseases. Throughout the hospital, we are asking all our patients about their recent travel and where the people close to them have traveled, possible exposures to COVID-19, as well as about any signs of illness. To protect our patients and staff and ensure that healthcare providers and staff are available to care for patients, Newton-Wellesley Hospital has instituted new staff guidelines/restrictions on both business and personal travel that are in effect until further notice.

Additionally, we have discontinued all public use of our conference and community space effective immediately until future notice. This includes cancelling all events open to the public and/or community groups at any of our facilities.

### **What should I do if I develop symptoms that might be COVID-19?**

- Always call 911 for a life-threatening emergency.
- For other situations, you **must call ahead to our office or your primary care physician's office for instructions on what to do.**
  - The number for the Mass General Cancer Center at Newton-Wellesley is: 617-219-1230

### **How do I stay up to date on the latest developments about COVID-19?**

Continue checking the Newton-Wellesley Hospital website and patient portal, Patient Gateway. In addition, we are in close contact with the CDC and the Boston Department of Public Health to share updates and receive the latest information. You can also keep up to date and learn more by visiting the COVID-19 pages of the CDC website.

### **Useful Resources**

General information from CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/index.html>

Pandemic preparedness: <https://www.ready.gov>

Travel information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

CDC website on handwashing: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>