



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Frequently Asked Questions About Coronavirus (COVID-19)

While COVID-19 has created challenges, everyone at Memorial Sloan Kettering has been working together to provide you with the best cancer care. This information answers some frequently asked questions about how COVID-19 may affect you, your health, and your cancer care.

Facts About COVID-19

What is the coronavirus?

There are many types of coronaviruses. The type of coronavirus at the center of this outbreak is a new virus, called SARS-CoV-2, that causes the disease COVID-19. The disease can cause mild to severe respiratory (breathing) problems, which can be serious, especially in older people and people with other health problems, including cancer.

How does COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through droplets when a person with it coughs or sneezes close to another person, like the way the common cold or flu spreads.

What are the signs of COVID-19?

COVID-19 causes cold or flu-like symptoms. These may include fever, cough, breathing problems, body aches, and chills. Some people also report losing their sense of taste or smell, fatigue, headaches, sore throat, congestion (stuffy nose), runny nose, diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting.

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. If you have cancer, it's important for you and your family members to closely follow steps to protect yourself, especially when it comes to frequent handwashing. We recommend you speak with your healthcare provider if you have concerns about your risk for COVID-19 being higher as a result of current or past cancer treatment.

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

Check this page often for the latest updates from MSK. You can also get answers to more frequently asked questions or learn more by visiting the pages of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (www1.nyc.gov) websites.

Coming to MSK

What do I need to do if I'm going to an appointment at

MSK?

Before Your Appointment

- Before your visit, we will ask you to complete a screening questionnaire that includes questions about any symptoms you may have and any recent travel. Screening for COVID-19 is an important part of preventing the spread of the disease.
- Check your temperature before coming to MSK. If you have a fever (temperature greater than 100° F or 38° C) or develop any other cold or flu-like symptoms (cough, difficulty breathing, body aches, chills, or new loss of sense of taste or smell) after you complete the screening questionnaire, call your MSK doctor's office before coming to MSK.

During Your Appointment

- For the safety of our patients and staff, we are limiting the number of people in our facilities. We've spaced out the time between appointments, and we've reduced the number of visitors and guests allowed in our locations. Our updated [visitor policy](#) applies to all MSK inpatient and outpatient locations, including Memorial Hospital, and is in place until further notice. We understand how important it is for your loved ones to be part of your care, and we have a virtual visitor program to bring loved ones into your visit using the technology in our treatment areas or your own device. If you don't have a phone or another device, we're happy to lend you

one to use during your appointment.

- When you arrive at MSK, follow any special instructions your healthcare team provides. A member of our staff will give you a mask. Please wear that mask at all times. You'll notice our staff is also wearing masks, and you may see people wearing other protective equipment as well, such as face shields.

After Your Appointment

- When your appointment is finished, you can choose to check out at the desk on your way out or have us contact you to schedule any follow-up appointments.

What is MSK doing to protect patients and staff?

We've put in place the strictest safety measures to ensure that you continue to receive the world-class cancer care you expect from us in the safest environment possible. These measures include:

- **Patient screenings:** All patients are screened the day before any scheduled visit to MSK. Screenings are conducted via phone call, text message or MyMSK, our patient portal.
- **Limited contact:** We continue to follow social distancing guidelines and are limiting the number of people who can enter our facilities. We've spaced out the time between patient visits and we've significantly reduced the number of visitors at our locations.

- **Curbside check-in:** Wherever possible, we've minimized the need for you to wait in our waiting rooms and have new check-in procedures that can be completed from your car or our building entrances.
- **Clean and safe environment:** We've further enhanced our cleaning efforts to disinfect and sanitize all high-touch and public areas. We also require all patients and staff to wear a mask at all times, which we provide to anyone entering our facilities who doesn't have one. Some staff are also wearing gloves, gowns, face shields, and other equipment for your protection.
- **Staff health checks:** All staff are screened for any signs of illness and perform daily health checks before reporting to work.
- **Testing:** Our COVID-19 testing is operating at full capacity, enabling us to test patients and staff as frequently as necessary. We can also order antibody testing to identify previous infections in patients and staff.
- **Virtual express check-out:** If you don't want to stop by on your way out to schedule your next appointment, let us know and we'll contact you for any follow-up appointments.

Does MSK offer telemedicine visits for patients as an alternative to in-person visits?

Yes, MSK offers telemedicine visits. A [telemedicine visit](#) is when

your healthcare provider uses a computer, smartphone, or tablet to see and talk with you. Ask your healthcare provider if a telemedicine visit is an option for you.

Are MSK locations open?

Yes, our inpatient and outpatient clinical locations remain open, and our healthcare teams are ready to provide the care and treatment you need. Appointments are available for new and existing patients. You can schedule an in-person visit or, if you aren't able or don't want to come in for an appointment, you can request a telemedicine visit, where you can speak to us remotely from the comfort of your home.

To continue to provide you with safe, excellent care, we've temporarily moved to telemedicine visits or reduced the hours for some of our facilities:

- Bendheim Integrative Medicine Center (open Mondays and Thursdays for select services)
- Charles Hallac Patient Recreation Center (within Memorial Hospital)
- Sillerman Center for Rehabilitation (relocated to the Rockefeller Outpatient Pavilion at 53rd Street and the David H. Koch Center for Cancer Care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center)
- MSK Ralph Lauren Center is open Monday through Friday

- MSK Counseling Center (open three days per week, by appointment only. Additional in-person visits relocated to additional outpatient locations.)

The services we normally provide at these locations continue to be available at other locations and through telemedicine visits.

Will MSK be canceling any appointments?

MSK is open and ready to care for you. If we need to reschedule one of your appointments for your safety, a member of your healthcare team will call you.

We understand it can be stressful to have a visit, treatment, procedure, or surgery rescheduled. Please know these decisions are being made by your doctor along with the rest of your healthcare team after carefully reviewing your medical care and needs. We will reschedule your appointment when your healthcare team thinks it's safe.

If you have any questions or concerns about your upcoming appointment or about coming to MSK, please contact your healthcare team.

Is MSK accepting new patients?

Yes, MSK continues to accept new patients.

How can I schedule an appointment at MSK?

You can request an appointment by calling your MSK doctor's office, calling our [Patient Access Service](#) at 800-525-2225, or by

visiting us [online](#). For [international patients](#), please call 212-639-4900. If you have questions about an upcoming appointment, or if your appointment was postponed, please call your MSK doctor's office for more information or to reschedule if necessary.

For Family, Friends, & Caregivers

Does MSK allow visitors?

For your protection, we are reducing the number of visitors or guests for our patients. See our [visitor policy](#) for more information.

We understand how important it is for your loved ones to be part of your care, and we have a virtual visitor program to help you stay connected using technology. If you don't have a phone or other device, we'll lend you one to use while you're at MSK.

How can my family and friends reach me if they aren't allowed to visit?

Your family and friends can contact you through a phone call, text message, or video chat whenever it's convenient for you. Whether you've been admitted to the hospital or you're with us for an outpatient appointment, we have tablets and other devices available to help you stay connected with your loved ones while receiving care. During your outpatient appointments, [we can help you](#) using technology in our treatment areas or your own device. New to video chatting? We'll help you learn about [how to use apps](#) on your phone or tablet.

Where can I find support if I have a family member or friend with COVID-19 at MSK?

If you're caring for someone with COVID-19, we have [many resources](#) to help. You can find support through a [virtual group](#) especially for caregivers or connect with other caregivers through our [Caregiver Support program](#). If find yourself helping a friend or family member recover from COVID-19, we have educational resources to help you with their [medical care](#) as well as managing the [stress](#) you may be feeling.

Support and Resources for MSK Patients

Are there resources at MSK to help me cope with the stress from COVID-19?

It's normal to feel stressed, sad, or worried about COVID-19, especially if you or your loved one is sick. There are many things you can do to take care of yourself and manage your stress, including staying connected to family and friends, trying relaxation techniques, starting a hobby, and disconnecting from the news. MSK has a variety of resources to help you deal with this difficult situation. [Learn more about ways to manage stress and anxiety.](#)

We have created [new programming](#) and modified existing programming to meet your needs during this difficult time. Visit [Virtual Programs](#) for a listing of our online educational and support programs run by our social workers, dietitians, and other specialists. You can also find meditation, guided imagery,

movement, and other classes offered by our [Integrative Medicine Service](#). If you're in the hospital, you can try some of our [tips for staying calm and connected](#) or browse a library of calming videos and meditations on the interactive TV screens in our inpatient rooms.

I'm having financial problems due to COVID-19. Are there any resources to help with my medical costs?

We understand that many people are facing financial difficulties due to COVID-19. We continue to operate the [Food to Overcome Outcome Disparities](#) program, which provides food for patients in need by delivering groceries and offering curbside pickup for those coming to MSK for an appointment. Our patient billing services team is also available to help. Please call us at 646-227-3378 to learn about financial assistance options. For [international patients](#), please call 212-639-4900.

COVID-19 Screening & Prevention

How is MSK screening patients?

We're screening all patients for COVID-19 symptoms and recent travel before they enter any MSK facility. If you have cold or flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, body aches, chills, or new loss of sense of taste or smell), call your MSK doctor's office before coming to MSK, even if you have an appointment.

How can I protect myself from getting COVID-19?

You can protect yourself from COVID-19 the same way you would from other respiratory infections, such as the common cold or flu.

- Wash your hands often, for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Disinfect areas that you touch often. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks. The Environmental Protection Agency has compiled [this list of disinfectant products](#) known to work against the coronavirus.
- Stay home as much as possible. If you go outside, keep a safe distance of at least 6 feet from other people and wear a cloth face covering, like a scarf, in public settings where it's difficult to maintain a safe distance (such as grocery stores and pharmacies).

COVID-19 Testing & Treatment

Can I get tested for COVID-19 at MSK?

We're screening our patients for symptoms of COVID-19 and testing them as needed. MSK is not offering testing to members of the general public.

I noticed my patient chart says that "coronavirus" was detected in my lab tests. Does that mean I may have

COVID-19?

No, it does not. The routine tests done at MSK test only for the types of coronavirus that have been around for a long time, like the types that cause the common cold. If you've been tested for COVID-19 at MSK, your results will display separately as COVID-19.

What is COVID-19 testing like?

In the most common way to conduct the test, a healthcare provider places a swab in your nose to collect a sample from the back of your nose and throat.

If I get COVID-19, will I be sent to another hospital for treatment?

No. If you're being treated for cancer at MSK, you won't be sent to another hospital if you get COVID-19. If you need to be admitted to the hospital, we have dedicated units for taking care of people with COVID-19. If you have COVID-19 and are well enough to be home, the healthcare providers from our COVID-19 Management Program will care for you.

What do I need to know about COVID-19 as a cancer survivor?

Cancer and cancer treatment can weaken the immune system, but when treatment ends, most people's immune system recovers. The biggest risk factor for getting COVID-19 is being exposed to the virus so as a cancer survivor the most effective thing you can do is follow [CDC guidelines](#), such as social

distancing and [washing your hands](#) thoroughly. If you have concerns about your risk for COVID-19 being higher as a result of past cancer treatment, talk with your healthcare provider.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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