



COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Will patients be able to get the vaccine from NWMS?

As you may have heard, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recommended that the first doses of the vaccine go to healthcare workers at risk of infection and residents of long-term care facilities, who are at the highest risk of severe illness and death.

As more vaccines are approved and more doses become available, NWMS expects to receive them. We will follow CDC and Washington State guidelines for vaccine distribution to make sure that patients who are medically eligible for the vaccine can get it as soon as possible.

For the time being, we are watching and waiting to learn more about changes in supply, approvals of other COVID-19 vaccines, and rapidly changing recommendations on what group(s) of people should get the vaccine next. Until we know more, **we are not scheduling patients for the COVID-19 vaccine or taking names for a waiting list. However, we will encourage and give vaccines to our patients in the order that was recommended by CDC and by the American Society of Clinical Oncology as soon as we are able to.**

We will continue to monitor guidelines and studies closely and update this webpage when we have more information. In the meantime, you can visit the [CDC's COVID-19 vaccine webpage](#), which has a large online library of materials.

Is the vaccine recommended for cancer patients?

Currently, the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended in patients with cancer to help reduce the risk of infection with COVID-19, as long as they do not have a contraindication. The only contraindication is an anaphylactic reaction to any vaccine prior. Any patient and any person without this condition is eligible. Having cancer puts patients at an increased risk for severe illness if infected with the COVID-19 virus. The potential for seriousness of the infection and delay in cancer treatment can create harmful situations. All possible steps to reduce risk of infection with COVID-19 should be considered, and the vaccine is an important tool for protection. Though some side effects are being circulated in the media, most people do not get major side effects and all side effects have been treatable and short term so far. The side effects are reaction to the vaccine and not a real infection. This vaccine has no risk of causing the infection. While side effects are not common and they are treatable, a real Covid-19 infection is much more dangerous and could be deadly.

Is the vaccine safe and effective in patients with other underlying medical conditions?

As we continue to learn more about the virus and the vaccine, the benefits of the vaccine strongly outweigh the risk. It is possible that some patients who have a weakened immune system could have a reduced response to the vaccine; however, the vaccine could still reduce severity of illness if infected with COVID-19. It is important to continue to follow other measures to prevent infection.

Can I stop wearing a mask once I have the vaccine?

No, after receiving the vaccine, continue to follow guidance on infection prevention:

- Physical distancing, masks, sanitizers, and hygiene measures are important to continue to prevent infection in patients with cancer.

Once an adequate amount of people are vaccinated and herd immunity in the society is achieved, we will all be able to take off the masks and go back to a more "normal" state. Since the virus is still very much in circulation, we cannot guarantee a zero infection risk, especially in patients with lower immunity, however, as mentioned earlier, we expect some protection and masks and social distancing will provide extra prevention in the meantime.

If I am on treatment, when should I get the vaccine when its available?

Decisions on when to receive the vaccine can be discussed with your oncologist and made on an individual basis depending on the situation and current therapy. This will become clearer once we have enough vaccine and a priority list for cancer patients is provided by health authorities. Your oncologist will let you know when this happens.

- Contraindications to the vaccine include having a anaphylactic or very severe allergic reaction to any ingredient in the COVID-19 vaccine. Patients with past severe allergic reactions not related to vaccines can still receive the vaccination.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

COVID-19 symptoms include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Sore throat
- Stuffy nose or runny nose
- Loss of taste or smell
- New onset of diarrhea
- Muscle aches and pains

What should NWMS patients do if they have symptoms?

If you have an appointment scheduled and have COVID-19 symptoms, please call your care team before coming to the clinic. Knowing about symptoms before you come into the clinic helps us keep everyone safe.

Are cancer patients at greater risk of contracting COVID-19?

According to experts, patients with blood malignancies (non-Hodgkin lymphoma, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, acute myeloid leukemia, acute lymphoblastic leukemia and multiple myeloma) and those who have received bone marrow transplants are most vulnerable because they have the most profound immune deficits. Patients who are in active treatment for any type of cancer are also at risk. Please see the [CDC's webpage](#) on COVID-19 and cancer for more information. Patients who are not in active treatment should also be cautious and follow widely distributed public health guidelines.

What is the difference between COVID-19 and the flu?

The flu and COVID-19 are both contagious illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a new coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2). The flu is caused by infection with influenza viruses.

It may be hard to tell the difference between the flu and COVID-19 from symptoms alone because some of the symptoms are similar. You may need to get tested for COVID-19 to help confirm a diagnosis. For more information on COVID-19 and the flu, visit the [CDC's flu and COVID-19 webpage](#).

Is NWMS offering flu shots?

Yes. NWMS patients can get flu shots. Contact your care team for more information on how to get one.

What is NWMS doing to protect patients?

- Screening all who enter the clinic for COVID-19 symptoms and testing, if appropriate.
- Providing masks to all staff and patients in the clinic.
- Providing face shields to all staff.

- All patients and staff in NWMS clinics must wear a mask. If patients and visitors aren't wearing one, a mask will be provided upon arrival. Please see [CDC guidelines](#) on how to protect yourself for more information.
- Limiting the number of visitors. This includes:
 - Scheduling telehealth appointments
 - No visitor policy
 - Keeping all non-essential staff out of the clinic.
- Postponing all in person patient education events, classes and volunteer opportunities.
- Increasing the frequency of cleaning high-touch surfaces such as door handles and elevator buttons.

Should I be worried about getting infected with COVID-19 at NWMS?

NWMS has extensive and thorough infection control procedures, and we are doing everything we can to ensure the health and safety of our community. We have protocols and systems in place to keep all patients, visitors and staff safe.

What can I do to keep myself, my family and friends safe?

- Avoid going to gatherings with large numbers of people and follow social distancing guidelines.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Wear a cloth face covering or a mask when you are out in public and cannot practice social distancing.
- Wear a cloth face covering (we at NWMS prefer at least surgical masks) before you enter a healthcare setting. At NWMS, you will be given extra masks upon entering.
- Practice good hand hygiene and [cough and sneeze etiquette](#). Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be transmitted through food or water systems. However, you can take extra steps to help protect your health while preparing, cooking and shopping for food.
- Plan how you will take care of sick family members. Make plans for childcare if you are sick or if your child is sick. Have a thermometer at home so you can check for fever if you or a loved one feels ill.
- Stay informed – check the [CDC site](#) regularly for new updates.

Can I have a telehealth appointment with my provider?

If you are a current NWMS patient and your provider decides it is medically appropriate, you may be able to have an appointment via telehealth. If it is an option for you, your scheduler/team coordinator will call you to make sure you have the right technology and schedule your appointment. All patients at NWMS are encouraged to use telehealth unless otherwise requested by your oncologist.

Is NWMS testing patients for COVID-19?

We offer testing to eligible patients. If you are an NWMS patient with symptoms and think you need to be tested for COVID-19, please call our office.

Patients who come to the clinic for appointments are evaluated and if they need to be tested, it is done in an area away from other patients and family members.

How long does it take for results to come back?

Generally, we can get COVID-19 test results back within 48-72 hours.

Have any NWMS patients or staff had COVID-19?

NWMS has identified patients and staff who have tested positive for COVID-19. We are following the CDC and Department of Health guidelines for notifying people who are at risk of exposure and giving them guidance on next steps. Environmental Services has increased the frequency of cleaning of high-touch surfaces such as door handles and elevator buttons. The disinfectants that we use are effective at killing COVID-19.

Should I wear a mask in public?

Washington state requires people to wear face coverings in indoor public spaces such as stores, offices and restaurants and outdoors when you can't stay 6 feet apart from others.

You do not need to wear a cloth face covering or a mask:

- In your home when you are only with people in your household.
- When you are alone in your car.
- When you are outdoors, and people are far apart.

For exceptions and other information, visit [Washington state's coronavirus response website](#).

Is it safe to go out in public?

In general, the closer you are to others and the longer the time you are with them, the higher the risk of spreading COVID-19. If you decide to go out in public, protect yourself by following the guidelines provided by the CDC.

Is it safe to do things like go to work, the grocery store, restaurants, and special events? What about traveling?

Visit the [CDC's webpage Daily Activities and Going Out](#) for information on each of these topics and more.

More resources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health](#)
- [Washington State COVID-19 information](#)
- [American Cancer Society \(ACS\): Coronavirus, COVID-19, and Cancer](#)
- [CancerCare®: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources](#)
- [Cancer.Net: Coronavirus 2019, What People With Cancer Need to Know](#)