

Tēnā koutou e ngā pukumahi maha o te motu nei

The COVID-19 pandemic is particularly challenging for those living with cancer, especially those undergoing active cancer therapy, and their whānau. We thank you for the work you are doing, in ever-changing circumstances, to support them. We understand how difficult it is to balance the safety of your staff, volunteers and their families with the activities you undertake for those with cancer. We appreciate all you are doing.

The Cancer Control Agency has been working closely with cancer treatment services to ensure they continue to be able to provide the best possible care for patients during the different Alert Levels of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have provided advice to DHBs that cancer services should be continuing at this time. Patients you work with may notice some changes, including virtual consults or changes to treatment delivery to keep them out of hospital. There is also consideration of treatments that can be deferred without impacting outcomes and consideration of treatments where the immunosuppressive risk is greater than the potential benefits at this time. Clinicians will discuss any changes with patients. We are also aware that there may be occasional local disruptions to treatment due to the specific site issues (such as staff being required to self-isolate) but centres are working hard at both prevention and mitigation strategies to minimise disruption.

An Agency response team has been set up comprising of key Agency staff and key sector contacts allowing us to respond quickly as the situation changes. We are keeping a close watching brief on international advice in relation to people with cancer in the context of COVID-19. Prof Diana Sarfati is in regular contact with the Director-General, the Minister and the DHBs, and is working hard to keep cancer treatment at the forefront of decision-making in the Ministry.

This pandemic has the potential to impact New Zealand and its health system for an extended period of time. Take care of yourselves, your people and their families. He waka eke noa, we are all in this together.

Ngā mihi maioha ki a koutou

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