

Screening for cancer during COVID-19



Routine screenings for cancer were down as much as 94% compared to the previous average¹

Delaying your cancer screening? While it's true you should postpone any clinic visits you can to conserve health system resources and reduce patient contact during COVID-19,¹ be cautious. Self-exams and physical vigilance may work for the time-being, but the high potential risk of delays is the diagnosis of a more-advanced cancer. To ensure you still critically detect cancer early, it's crucial to understand which screenings you should—or shouldn't—postpone.



When to call your doctor for support

Telehealth may be the best option if you're a:

- Survivor who has completed treatment and not shown symptoms
- Low-risk patient taking hormonal or oral chemotherapy

When it might be okay to delay

Ask yourself, does your risk of developing cancer outweigh your chances of getting COVID-19? If you're healthy with no symptoms and no risk factors, you can likely defer elective screenings such as mammograms and colonoscopies.

Staying safely at home, consider these alternatives for early cancer detection and ask your physician if they might be right for you:

- At-home colon cancer tests – the fecal occult blood test and the fecal DNA test that collect a stool sample to be sent to a lab
- Skin cancer self-exams – monthly checks conducted by you of easy-to-see places and a family member or friend for harder-to-view sites such as your scalp, back, and backsides of the ears

When you shouldn't wait

Seriously consider getting screened by your physician if you notice:

- New skin lesions that grow in size or don't disappear, changes to existing lesions, or a severe rash—these may be signs of skin cancer
- A new lump or mass in your breast, bloody discharge from the nipple, or changes in breast skin such as redness—these could be signs of breast cancer
- Changes in bowel habits, including blood in the stool—this may be a symptom of colon cancer
- A new or increasing cough, shortness of breath, or excessive fatigue—these are possible symptoms of lung cancer

Try to maintain your screening schedule if you've:

- Received a diagnosis or developed a condition that may increase your risk for cancer, such as myelodysplastic syndrome, inflammatory bowel disease, or polyps
- Determined any family history of cancers
- Found a known genetic mutation
- Received an abnormal screening in the past

References

¹Printz C. Cancer screenings decline significantly during pandemic. *Cancer*. 2020;126(17):3894–3895.

²Uzzo RG, Kutikov A, Geynisman DM. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): Cancer screening, diagnosis, treatment, and posttreatment surveillance in uninfected patients during the pandemic. *UpToDate*. 2020.

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