

The Talking Circle

Cultivating Indigenous Cancer Knowledge



APRIL 2020



CENTER FOR INDIGENOUS
CANCER RESEARCH

SPECIAL EDITION

Indigenous Resiliency, Cancer, and the Coronavirus

Using a Good Mind during the Coronavirus Pandemic

Stress, anxiety and worry are a natural part of life. However, there may be times when thoughts become excessively worrisome or invasive. This is especially true for Native American cancer patients, families who have a member recently diagnosed, and cancer survivors. This type of distress can further weaken a compromised immune system, making individuals more susceptible to respiratory infection.



SYMPTOMS OF STRESS DURING AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAK CAN INCLUDE:

- ✓ Fear and worry about your health, family well-being and community wellness.
- ✓ Changes in sleep and eating habits.
- ✓ Gripping fear of being at high risk for infection, and compulsive sanitation behaviors.
- ✓ Increased use of drugs, tobacco, alcohol, or other addictive behaviors.

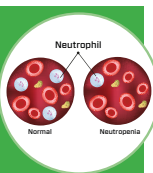
COVID-19, Cancer, and Survivorship in Indigenous Communities

How Chemotherapy changes our risk for infections



Chemotherapy drugs are used to treat cancer by killing the faster growing cells in the body—both good cells and cancer cells.

Neutropenia is a side effect of chemotherapy and means your body has fewer than normal infection-fighting blood cells.



Infection is when germs enter your body and cause illness. Neutropenia can lead to infection.

What is Coronavirus/COVID-19? COVID-19 is a new strain of coronavirus, an airborne respiratory virus that is spread from human to human and is very contagious. COVID-19 was traced back to Wuhan, China in December 2019 (CDC, 2020). COVID-19 has symptoms that mock the common cold and the flu. The symptoms to look out for are fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Those at greater risk are our elders, and those who have underlying health conditions.

Are cancer patients at greater risk? Our cancer patients are a unique population who have fragile immune systems due to cancer treatment (CDC, 2018), putting them at a greater risk for COVID-19. Cancer survivors should take the same precautions as a cancer patient because there is limited information on the new COVID-19 and cancer survivors.

How can we take care of our elders and immune-compromised relatives? As a community, we need to make sure our elders, elders with cancer, elder cancer survivors and our immune-compromised family and friends are taken care of. We know that many of us have big and close families, where we see Gramma, Grandpa, aunties and uncles often. We need to keep our loved ones safe by keeping our distance. It is very important to practice physical distancing. Stay home if you are sick. Wash your hands! Call your elders, friends, and family to check on them and see if they need anything. Create a community “food pantry” for those who are unable to make it to the store. Use this time to explore your backyard/woods for plant medicines to keep you and your family healthy. If you are missing your elders and family members, use this time to start beading, knitting, sewing or painting and make something for your loved ones.



COVID-19 and Indigenous Cancer Patient Safety Tips

There is a lot of information circulating regarding Coronavirus (COVID-19). To help cut through the overwhelming updates and data, our CICR team is providing some “Do’s and Don’ts” for cancer patients and their families to consider as we all work together to keep one another healthy.

Do’s: Cancer Treatment & COVID-19



- ✓ Aim for a balance in holistic wellness, including mental, physical, spiritual and emotional health.
- ✓ Consult your cancer care team regarding your treatment plan and options for staying physically active (walking, dancing, etc.)
- ✓ Create two plans: 1.) Family and Friends Plan and 2.) Personal Plan to make sure you are prepared to take action in an organized fashion to continue your cancer treatment during a disaster situation.
- ✓ Check in with your cancer care team to confirm your upcoming appointment. To further reduce risk of acquiring COVID-19 in a hospital or clinic setting, physicians may postpone routine or non-urgent appointments, or arrange for a virtual visit by video chat.
- ✓ Communicate with your health care provider or cancer care team if you are experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms – fever, cough, shortness of breath, and other flu-like symptoms. Talk to your team regarding these symptoms before coming to the hospital or clinic.
- ✓ Have several weeks of medication and supplies in case you need to stay at home for long periods of time during this COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✓ If you’re enrolled in a clinical trial contact your clinical trial coordinator, and follow their guidance.
- ✓ Stay home as much as possible, avoiding handshakes, washing your hands frequently, avoiding touching your face and attending social gatherings, and getting a flu vaccine.
- ✓ Wear gloves when handling “high-touch” items – for example, when using gas pumps and “pay at pump options.” Be sure to use hand sanitizer that is 60% alcohol or wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds after you take off your gloves.

Don’ts: Cancer Treatment & COVID-19



- ✓ Avoid nonessential travel.
- ✓ Don’t be afraid to ask questions about COVID-19 and your cancer treatment.
- ✓ Don’t hide symptoms like shortness of breath, cough, or fever from your clinical team.
- ✓ Don’t shop where there will be large groups of people. If possible, shop online for food and home supplies and choose pickup or delivery options.
- ✓ Avoid in-person visits with family and friends.
- ✓ Do not reuse surgical masks. According to the World Health Organization, masks are only effective for one use.

Mythbusters

Can an ultraviolet disinfection lamp kill the new coronavirus?

UV lamps should not be used to sterilize hands or other areas of the skin as UV radiation can cause skin irritation.



#2019nCoV



Indigenous healing and prayers through jingle dress dancing

Indigenous Resiliency and Social Distancing

Your mental wellness is important. Try some of these strategies for coping and resilience:

- ✓ Check in with your cancer care team and your tribal or regional Indian Health Services for updates by phone, online or through the patient portal.
- ✓ Connect with virtual cancer support groups.
- ✓ Take breaks from reading or listening to multimedia and replace with traditional storytelling or reading books that share indigenous wellness stories.
- ✓ Engage in ancestral activities and connect to nature by walking outdoors, hunting, fishing, gathering roots, picking berries, drinking spring water, and preparing traditional foods and medicines.
- ✓ Don't panic; call an elder or youth to lift spirits.
- ✓ Listen to ancestral music, sing, or dance.
- ✓ Get fresh air by opening windows for short periods of time throughout the day.
- ✓ Speak to someone and avoid long periods of isolation.



Indigenous Knowledge and Modern Medicine

WATCH ON
You Tube

This video addresses health disparities related to indigenous populations and cancer, screening and access to healthcare, and offers clinical trial information.

Reducing Risk by Bolstering Natural Defenses

While we rarely stop to think about the health of our immune system, every day we make choices that may strengthen or weaken its capacity to fight infection. During cancer treatment for example, certain medications damage the immune system and puts our cancer survivors at greater risk for respiratory infection such as coronavirus. Improving sleep and nutrition are two important ways you may potentially reduce the risk and severity of acute infections:

Sleep

Just as chronic distress negatively impacts immune function, so does poor quality sleep. Often, they go hand in hand. A common side effect of chemotherapy is insomnia, or lack of restful sleep. Sleep deprivation has been linked to increased risk of numerous infections.



What to do: Speak to your doctor.

If you are not achieving at least 7-9 hours of restful sleep, there may be underlying issues your doctor can help identify. Common examples include cancer treatment, certain drugs, sleep apnea, trauma, chronic stress, poor sleep hygiene habits, and physical pain. Ancestral activities such as physical activity and eating natural foods of the earth can support the body's natural restful state. Listening to relaxing music, playing traditional instruments such as drums, and meditation may also improve sleep quality.

Nutrition

Nutrient quality is overlooked as integral part of strengthening immune function to both prevent infection, as well as reduce severity and hasten recovery. Nutrient reserves are often compromised in cancer patients and survivors. More specifically, essential nutrients such as water, vitamins, minerals, fatty acids and protein cannot be made by the body and need to be consumed in optimal quantities.



What to do: Speak to your doctor.

Physicians may order blood tests to review and discuss your levels of vitamins A, B, D, E, and K, iron, zinc, selenium and iodine. Low levels could negatively impact immune function. Normalizing low levels of nutrients in the body can help improve immune system resiliency. Health care providers may also refer you to a dietician who can help identify food strategies to address any deficiencies. Traditional Indigenous foods, including salmon, walleye, venison, turkey, rabbit, squirrel, berries, roots, herbs, greens, bison, and wild rice, naturally contain high levels of these nutrients.



The Talking Circle

Cultivating Indigenous Cancer Knowledge

APRIL 2020

Need to Talk to Someone?

- ✓ Talk to family, friends, spiritual leaders or Indigenous medicine people. Simply expressing your fears can greatly alleviate anxiety and uncertainty.
- ✓ Reach out to your Indian Health Services Behavioral Health Team.
- ✓ Tribal and Indian Gaming Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) by way of human resources, is a free service that can provide virtual counseling for employees and family members that reside in the same household.
- ✓ Call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Distress Helpline: **1-800-985-5990** or text TalkWithUs to **66746 (TTY 1-800-846-8517)**.
- ✓ If you are experiencing severe distress from the coronavirus outbreak, please [CLICK HERE](#).

Our Mission

The Center for Indigenous Cancer Research (CICR) aims to honor the value of indigenous knowledge, sovereignty and the environment through community driven partnerships and collaborative cancer research, and education.

Pictured from left to right: **Rodney Haring, PhD, MSW**, CICR Director; **Josie Raphaelito, MPH**, Research Project; Coordinator; **Will Maybee BS, CSCS**, Community Relations Coordinator; **Whitney Ann Henry, BS**, Research Assistant. Not pictured: **David Mattson, Jr., MD**, Director of Radiation Oncology Residency Program; **Shannon MacCallum, MBA, PhD**, Student



**ROSWELL
PARK**
COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER

**CENTER FOR
INDIGENOUS
CANCER
RESEARCH**

Elm and Carlton Streets | Buffalo, New York 14263

(716) 845-4541 | CICRinfo@RoswellPark.org | RoswellPark.org