

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS AND PATIENTS WITH CANCER: VACCINATE. MONITOR. EDUCATE.

AN ESMO CALL TO ACTION

With over 87 million cases and 1.9 million deaths, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives in more ways than one¹. For the vulnerable, including patients with cancer, the effects have been even more severe. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has recently updated its GLOBOCAN database to increase the number of new cancer cases for 2020 to 19.3 million, of which 4.4 million are in Europe². The after-effects of the pandemic may lead to delayed and accumulated diagnoses of new cancer cases, as well as occurrence of preventable cases, impacting on mortality in the coming years.

The approval of strong vaccine candidates by robust regulatory agencies provides us with hope, indicating the end of this challenging period. But given the limited quantities of the vaccine, ensuring an equitable and fair distribution within a country and globally, will be our next challenge.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization has published a framework to help guide Member States on the fair and equitable distribution of the scarce resource, i.e. vaccine.

A FEW PRINCIPLES FROM THE WHO "VALUES TO PRIORITY GROUPS" HAVE THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES³:

- 1 reduce deaths and disease burden;
- 2 protect the continuing function of essential services, including health services;
- 3 protect those who bear significant additional risks and burdens for the welfare of others.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PATIENTS WITH CANCER

- **High risk** of developing severe form of COVID-19 and death
- **Pausing, stopping or never starting anticancer treatment due to** the SARS-CoV2 infection
- **Fear** of contracting the virus
- **Halting or limiting regular checkups and monitoring**

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CANCER

The lack of regular screening to prevent new cancer cases and the resulting difficulties in patient adherence to treatment due to COVID-19 will lead to an influx of cases in the coming years.

In the context of the Member States developing their vaccination strategies, the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO), a scientific society representing over 25,000 oncology professionals would like to request the Member States to consider the following:

- 1 **VACCINATE ALL CANCER PATIENTS**
in line with the WHO principles aiming to reduce deaths and disease burden. Patients with active disease or receiving anticancer treatment deserve an additional priority in case of limitations only.
- 2 **DILIGENTLY COLLECT DATA**
via suitable registries, in order to monitor the effects of the vaccines in the vulnerable population, including patients with cancer and immune response monitoring.
- 3 **EDUCATE AND INSTIL CONFIDENCE**
among the public and patients in receiving the vaccines and provide them with up-to-date information in lay language.

As healthcare professionals and patient advocacy organizations representing cancer patients and their families, our aim is to work together to ensure that WHO's first principle is adhered to: **to reduce deaths and disease burden and protect those who most need protection.**



The European Society for Medical Oncology is the leading European professional organisation for medical oncology. Comprising more than 25,000 oncology professionals from over 160 countries, we are the society of reference for oncology education and information. We are committed to supporting our members to develop and advance in a fast-evolving professional environment. For all information concerning ESMO's work on COVID-19 and Cancer, please refer to: <https://www.esmo.org/covid-19-and-cancer>

ESMO Statements on Vaccinations against COVID-19 in patients with cancer: www.esmo.org/covid-19-and-cancer/covid-19-vaccination

1. Johns Hopkins, University of Medicine. Coronavirus Resource Center. Available at: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (Last accessed: 07 January 2021)
2. International Agency for Research on Cancer. 2020. Global Cancer Observatory. Available at: <https://gco.iarc.fr/today/data/factsheets/cancers/39-All-cancers-fact-sheet.pdf> (Last accessed: 23 December 2020)
3. World Health Organization. 2020. WHO SAGE values framework for the allocation and prioritization of COVID-19 vaccination. Available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/334299/WHO-2019-nCoV-SAGE_Framework-Allocation_and_prioritization-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

THE CALL TO ACTION HAS BEEN ENDORSED BY THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS*:



*The list of organisations endorsing the ESMO Call to Action is being updated on an ongoing basis (last updated: 18 January 2021).