# INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Who Are at Higher Risk?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Expert Committee Suggestions for Patients on Chemotherapy/ Radiotherapy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Steps Taken by NHM &amp; TNHSRP For Ensuring Uninterrupted Services</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>General Precautions for Cancer Patients</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GUIDELINES FOR CANCER PATIENTS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1. INTRODUCTION

Cancer patients are a vulnerable group in COVID-19 pandemic due to their compromised immune status. Anyone who has a weakened immune system is more at risk of being seriously ill if they get infected with coronavirus (COVID-19). So, People with cancer may be at a higher risk of acquiring coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

Cancer patients need to be extra careful with precautions to avoid contracting COVID-19 infection due to compromised immune system.

Other vulnerable groups include the elderly and those with underlying health conditions like Diabetes, Heart Disease, Chronic Lung Disease, Chronic Kidney Disease, etc.
2. **WHO ARE AT HIGHER RISK?**

Cancer patients who are undergoing treatment are at greater risk for complications from COVID-19. These include:

1. Patients undergoing active chemotherapy
2. Patients undergoing immunotherapy or other ongoing antibody-based treatments for Cancer
3. Patients undergoing other targeted therapies

3. **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- These recommendations should be used as guidance for prioritising the various aspects of cancer care in order to mitigate the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the management of cancer patients.

- The situation is evolving, and pragmatic actions may be required to deal with the challenges of treating patients, while ensuring their rights, safety and wellbeing.
4. EXPERT COMMITTEE SUGGESTIONS FOR PATIENTS ON CHEMOTHERAPY/RADIOThERAPY

- Universal precautions for health care workers and patients to be strictly followed – Hand wash, Disinfection, Sanitisation, Full PPE for Health Care Workers.

- Separate section at Out Patient and In-Patient in the Triage area for cancer patients.

- Shift system of work for the health care providers including all cadres - the same patient is seen by the same doctor during the entire course of treatment

- Minimizing the hospital visits for follow up cases, second opinion by utilising tele consultation services and advising to visit nearby facilities for collection of drugs.

- Call on alteration of regimen / postponement of treatment to prevent immunosuppression – on case to case basis

- Provision of Radiation therapy as In-patient procedure to prevent cross infection from and to home

- Currently all curative treatment regimens are being continued

- High end techniques such as Image guided Radiotherapy (IGRT), Intensity modulated Radiotherapy (IMRT), Volumetric Modulated Arc Therapy (VMAT), RAPID ARC, Stereotactic body Radiation therapy (SBRT) and Stereotactic Radio-Surgery (SRS) can be included in insurance packages

- Protocol for COVID testing prior and after treatment to be addressed
5. STEPS TAKEN BY NHM & TNHSRP FOR ENSURING UNINTERRUPTED SERVICES

• A dedicated coordinated team approach involving Insurance, 108, NHM & TNHSRP was planned & executed

• Line list of patients who need transport assistance obtained from the centres and transport arranged through JSSK (102) vehicles

• Availability of adequate stock of consumables ensured

• Coordinated with the TNMSC & suppliers for ensuring adequate stock of drugs.

• Identification of alternative facility in case of closure due to COVID infection

• Random verification and feedback from the patient by head office
6. GENERAL PRECAUTIONS FOR CANCER PATIENTS

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

- Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and others. When someone coughs, sneezes, or speaks they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person has the disease.

- Avoid going to crowded places. Where people come together in crowds, you are more likely to come into close contact with someone that has COVID-19 and it is more difficult to maintain physical distance of 1 metre (3 feet).

- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and infect you.

- Make sure you, and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash your hands. Droplets spread virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.

- Stay home and self-isolate even with minor symptoms such as cough, headache, mild fever, until you recover. Have someone to bring you supplies. If you need to leave your house, wear a mask to avoid infecting others. Avoiding contact with others will protect them from possible COVID-19 and other viruses.

- If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention, but call by telephone in advance if possible and follow the directions of your local health authority. National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.
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