



THE SRI LANKA COLLEGE OF ONCOLOGISTS

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24th February 2021

The Sri Lanka College of Oncologists.

Press Release:

COVID-19 VACCINATION GUIDELINES: FOR CANCER PATIENTS IN SRI LANKA.

This letter to the Press is in response to the numerous queries forwarded to The Sri Lanka College of Oncologists, inquiring as to whether the COVID-19 vaccine is safe to be administered in Cancer patients.

Cancer patients are at increased risk of serious COVID-19 infection and the degree of risk varies based on underlying malignancy, type of immunosuppressive treatments given, debility, old age, malnutrition and other comorbidities. Prevention of the infection using the vaccine is very important to avoid infection related morbidity and mortality.

The COVID-19 vaccine is safe for use in cancer patients as it does not contain a live virus. The COVID-19 vaccine is important for patients with cancer, but it should not be given during periods of severe immunosuppression from chemotherapy because these cancer patients are unable to mount an adequate protective immune response to the vaccination.

The Sri Lanka College of Oncologists recommend the following guidance on vaccinating cancer patients against COVID-19 based on the current oncological guidelines of ESMO, ASCO, NCCN and other well-known cancer hospitals in the world.

1. Patients who have completed treatment and are on surveillance can be vaccinated. We recommend that they be vaccinated on a priority basis as they are still considered to be an 'at risk' group.
2. Patients who are on chemotherapy or about to commence chemotherapy should wait until one month after completion of the treatment, and their full blood count (FBC) should be normal before they can receive the COVID-19 vaccination.



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3. Patients with hematological malignancies (Leukaemia, Lymphoma and Multiple myeloma) tend to be more immunocompromised than patients with solid tumors and consequently will have an inadequate immune response, hence they may avoid vaccination.
4. As there is a lack of solid evidence on vaccine efficacy and immunogenicity, especially among patients with haematological malignancies, vaccinations for such patients can be considered on the recommendations of the treating Oncologist.
5. For paediatric cancer patients, currently no immunization against COVID-19 is given in Sri Lanka, but it is advisable to vaccinate their parents on a priority basis.

Considering the above facts with regard to vaccinating cancer patients, we have requested the Chief Epidemiologist, Epidemiology Unit, Ministry of Health to consider arranging a special vaccination program at the earliest, in all cancer centers in this country allowing us to ensure that all eligible patients receive the COVID-19 vaccination safely.

Thank you,

With Kind Regards,

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Dr. A J Hilmi
President
Sri Lanka College of Oncologists

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The Sri Lanka College of Oncologists
National Cancer Institute - Maharagama
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