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"Extra precautions and shielding strategies need to be adopted"

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Coronavirus outbreak has affected thousands of people in at least 186 countries which has affected the cancer care delivery system apart from affecting the overall health system. Cancer patients are more susceptible to coronavirus infection than individuals without cancer as they are in an immunosuppressive state because of the malignancy and anticancer treatment. Oncologists should be more attentive to detect coronavirus infection early, as any type of advanced cancer is at much higher risk for unfavorable outcomes. Oncology communities must ensure that cancer patients should spend more time at home and less time out in the community. Oncologists and other health care professionals involved in cancer care have a critical opportunity to communicate to their patients to pass on right information regarding practice modifications in view of COVID-19 outbreaks. Countries must isolate, test, treat and trace to control the coronavirus pandemic. There is a paucity of information on novel coronavirus infection and its impact on cancer patients and cancer care providers. To date, there is no scientific guideline regarding management of cancer patients in a background of coronavirus outbreak. In this regard Dr BS Ajaikumar, CEO and Chairman, HealthCare Global (HCG), Bengaluru shared his views about precautions to be taken by cancer patients during COVID-19 pandemic.

Is it safe for cancer patients to travel by air right now?

Some patients have weak immune systems or other health issues to consider, such as lung diseases. These conditions can put them at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Patients need to ensure that all guidelines and advisories pertaining to the travelling are followed and only travel if it is completely unavoidable. Extra precautions and shielding strategies need to be adopted to ensure that the chances of getting infected are minimised.

How can patients keep their immune system strong?

1. Exercise and stay active
2. Consume nutritious food
3. Practice simple yoga postures and pranayama (deep abdominal breathing)

What can patients do to protect themselves from COVID-19 infection?

1. Wash hands frequently with warm water and soap, for at least 20 seconds
2. Use face masks and follow hygienic practices during coughing and sneezing
3. Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, and nose
4. Social distancing to be strictly followed
5. Isolation anxiety to be avoided by being mentally active

If someone had COVID-19 and recovered, can they still transmit the disease?

Yes, patients who have recovered from COVID-19 infection can still transmit the disease if they are carriers. But researchers are yet to draw a conclusion on this.

If an individual is affected by COVID-19 once, can it be contracted again?

There are mixed reports about this from China, South Korea, the USA, and Italy, which suggest that once a patient is infected and recovers from COVID-19, a second infection might not be possible as the antibodies would have already developed to fight the infection. However, reports are now talking about multiple strains of the virus existing, and patients who have recovered from one strain getting potentially infected by another strain.