

Back to school during COVID-19: Letter to parents and caregivers with CHEO's Oncology program

Dear Caregiver,

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused all of us significant worry. For families taking care of children with cancer, we know that the worry is even higher. Decisions around school attendance are complex. Below you will find some guidance to some of the more common questions for children with cancer and school attendance that we have heard from families in the last few weeks.

The guidance is based on what is currently understood around risks of COVID infection in children with cancer, the current levels of infection in the community and the social, developmental and academic benefits of attending school.

I've heard that children generally do well if they get COVID-19. How serious is a COVID-19 in a child with cancer?

We are still learning about the effects of COVID-19 on different types of people, but so far the information suggests that the vast majority of children and teens seem to handle COVID-19 infections well and only very rarely develop serious complications. Unlike older adults with cancer, information to date also suggests that children with cancer generally handle COVID-19 infections well.

Can my child attend school in person this fall?

We believe that the majority of children with cancer who prior to the COVID-19 pandemic were attending school should be safe to attend school in person. Children in this group should follow the COVID related precautions that will be in place for all students in Ontario. Examples of children in this group include those with acute lymphoblastic leukemia in the maintenance phase of therapy, those receiving therapy for low grade glioma brain tumours or low risk Wilms tumours.

We believe that children with cancer who prior to the COVID-19 pandemic would not attend school because of their cancer and its therapy should not attend school in person. Examples include patients being treated for acute lymphoblastic leukemia who are early in therapy; patients receiving therapy for acute myeloid leukemia or high risk neuroblastoma or those who have undergone a recent stem cell transplant.

Can children or teenagers who have completed their cancer therapy attend school? What about siblings of children being treated for cancer?

We expect that the majority of children and teens who have completed their cancer therapy should be safe to attend school in person. We also feel that siblings of children with cancer should be able to attend school in person. They should follow the precautions that will be in place for all students

What help can we get in making this decision?

As always, please contact your primary treatment team with any concerns you may have and specifically around medical decision making for your child and school attendance.

We recognize the importance of families making the ultimate decision on school attendance based on the specifics of your child's medical care, your family's situation and your school.



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