

MEDIA RELEASE

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***Got cancer? Get vaccinated:* Leading cancer experts call on all health and medical professionals to spread the word**

Australians with cancer are being urged to get vaccinated, following new research analysis which reveals one in four people with cancer who contract COVID-19 die from the virus.

To help encourage Victorians with cancer to get vaccinated as soon as possible, the Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Taskforce has launched the *Got cancer? Get vaccinated* campaign – a collaborative initiative driven by leading Victorian oncologists, cancer health professionals and patient advocates concerned by the prevalence of vaccine hesitancy and confusion about the safety, risks and benefits of the vaccine.

Professor Grant McArthur, Co-Chair of the Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Taskforce and Executive Director of the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre Alliance, says health and medical professionals have a key role to play in encouraging patients to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

“Vaccination is vital for all Victorians, but especially people – including those with cancer – who are at higher risk of severe disease or death if they were to contract the virus.

“The vaccines are effective at both reducing the chances of contracting COVID-19, and reducing the severity if it is contracted.”

“Vaccination is safe and recommended for the vast majority of people with cancer, including people on active treatment and people with blood cancers. There is no evidence that people with cancer are at greater risk of side effects from the vaccine than anyone else,” Professor McArthur said.

Recent analysis combining 135 studies involving 33,000 patients from around the world, has revealed one in four people with cancer who contract COVID-19 die from the virus, rising to one in three for people with lung cancer or blood cancer¹. This is multiple times the risk to the general population. In addition, people with cancer are twice as likely to develop critical symptoms of the virus, leading to hospitalisation, ICU admissions and ventilation.

“Protection for people with cancer is essential against this dangerous virus. The benefits far outweigh any small risk from potential vaccination side effects and waiting is not a no-risk option,” Professor McArthur said.

“Even people who may have a lower immune response to the vaccine due to their cancer treatments are encouraged to be vaccinated.”

Professor McArthur, a cancer survivor himself, urged doctors to speak with their patients about vaccination.

“Until people get vaccinated, COVID-19 will remain a ticking time bomb for our community, especially for people affected by cancer.”

“As a cancer doctor and someone affected by cancer personally, I cannot emphasise the importance of this message enough: if you have cancer, get vaccinated.”

All people with cancer of all ages are eligible for vaccination now. People on active treatment for cancer are advised to consult with their doctor to discuss optimal timing for vaccination in relation to treatment cycles and any other individual considerations.

For more information please contact:

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About the Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Taskforce

The Victorian COVID-19 Cancer Network (VCCN) is a collaboration between VCCC alliance and Monash Partners Comprehensive Cancer Consortium (MPCCC) supported by Cancer Council Victoria and the Victorian Integrated Cancer Services.

The VCCN was established in March 2020 in response to the challenges involved with managing cancer care amid the current global health crisis and aims to provide support and advice to clinicians and health care services treating patients with cancer during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The VCCN is guided by a [taskforce of expert members](#) representing a wide range of disciplines including general practice, medical oncology, haematology, radiation oncology, paediatric and geriatric oncology, pharmacy and other specialities, as well as consumers, patient and government representatives.

More information

[Cancer Australia FAQs](#)

[Peter Mac / Cancer Council Victoria fact sheet](#)

Reference

1. Tagliamento, M. et al., 27 May 2021, *Mortality in adult patients with solid or hematological malignancies and SARS-CoV-2 infection with a specific focus on lung and breast malignancies: a systematic review and meta-analysis*. 27 May 2021
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