



CovidSurg | 2021
UK Version

Surgery for patients with cancer during the pandemic



NIHR Global Health Research Unit on
Global Surgery



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

If you or anyone you know have symptoms that are worrying you, have been diagnosed with cancer (or another condition requiring surgery), or have undergone surgery since the start of the pandemic, this booklet has been created to help.

It has been co-produced by patients, surgeons and researchers to support patients to access care and understand how surgical services are working to protect you. The information we share comes from research data from patients. We hope it answers some of the questions you may have.

We are very grateful to our Patient Advisory Group who have helped create this booklet.

*For more information, please visit:
<http://nihrglobalsurgery.org/surgeryduringcovid>*

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SEEKING CARE

If you have symptoms that are new or worrying, like a breast lump, blood in your poo or wee, persistent cough for more than 3 weeks, weight loss or bloating that doesn't go away, it is important to speak to your GP.

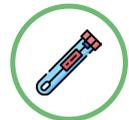
Most symptoms are not because of cancer, but investigating them early may mean that a cancer is easier to treat. If your GP suspects a cancer they can refer you to a specialist to investigate symptoms urgently.

Health services are open, diagnostic services are ready with safety measures in place... **please don't ignore your symptoms.**



Hospitals have adapted to the pandemic with the support of research data, to provide care whilst protecting patients from infection.

- Most hospitals have access to **Covid-free areas** for surgical patients. They provide ward care, operating rooms and intensive care facilities separate from Covid-19 patients.
- **Pre-operative Covid-19 testing** can help avoid patients with infection (but no symptoms) from undergoing surgery and risking serious complications
- **Vaccination** can protect patients from serious consequences of infection around the time of surgery
- Where possible, **delaying surgery for at least 7 weeks after Covid-19** infection returns the risk of breathing complications after surgery to the same level as patients with no history of infection. For patients with ongoing symptoms, a longer delay may be beneficial.



These measures are supported by robust research data that shows they reduce the risks to patients around the time of operation.

PROTECTING SURGICAL SERVICES

Covid-19 has caused delays and cancellations to surgery that have seriously affected patients. Delaying surgery risks the cancer growing or coming back sooner after surgery. Disproportionately, delays have affected patients over 70 years old or with advanced cancer, partly because they are more likely to need intensive care after their operation.

As we 'learn to live with Covid', surgical services are trying to protect patients from future delays to surgery. Sustainable safe surgery means re-organisation to ring-fence resources such as theatres, bed-spaces and teams.

Protected surgical services can ensure that cancer patients, particularly the most vulnerable patients do not undergo additional suffering or delays.



MOVING FORWARDS

Many patients, diagnosed with cancer since early 2020 have already experienced significant delays to their care. These delays may have increased the risks of surgery, of disease returning and will likely have increased patient anxiety.

For patients who have undergone delayed surgery, surgeons and hospital teams will closely monitor your progress, to investigate new symptoms or concerns and ensure any disease recurrence is detected early.



KEY MESSAGES

- ✔ If you have new symptoms, please tell us about them.
- ✔ If you are awaiting surgery, hospitals are open and ready to deliver safe care.
- ✔ If your surgery was delayed, please tell us about any new concerns, we will monitor you closely.

KEY TERMS

COVID-19 AND SARS-COV-2

COVID-19 is the name of the disease in this pandemic. It is caused by a virus known as SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2). It is mostly spread by droplets from the nose or mouth of an infected person. Most patients with COVID-19 experience mild or moderate symptoms that do not need hospital care. A minority of patients have more severe symptoms, may be admitted to hospital or require breathing and other organ support.

COVID-19-FREE AREAS

This is a designated COVID-19 free hospital or hospital environment with COVID-19 free wards, operating rooms and critical care facilities. Evidence shows that having an operation in a unit like this may reduce your risk of in-hospital transmission.

COVID-19-TESTING

This usually means a mouth and nose swab. You might need to go to hospital for this before your operation.

Who Are We?

CovidSurg is a global collaboration of surgeons, anaesthetists, researchers, and a Patient Advisory Group working to understand the impact of COVID-19 on surgical patients.

We have investigated the risks of COVID-19 for patients having an operation and the measures hospitals and patients can take to minimise the risks for the best outcomes. Our publications are listed here: <https://bit.ly/researchexplained>

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