



ESMO Statement

71st session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, 13-15 September 2021 Agenda Item 3: COVID-19 lessons learned: getting ready for the next pandemic

Honourable Chair, Esteemed Delegates,

The [European Society for Medical Oncology \(ESMO\)](#) is a global network of more than 25,000 cancer professionals from over 160 countries. ESMO's core mission is to improve the quality of cancer care, from prevention and diagnosis all the way to palliative care and patient follow-up. It is to educate – doctors, cancer patients and the general public – on the best practices and latest advances in oncology, and to promote equal access to optimal cancer care for all patients.

ESMO commends WHO's efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic and welcomes the report 'The COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned to date from the WHO European Region'. We agree with the ambitious and comprehensive measures proposed. We ask Member States to include more detailed measures in national health emergency response plans that:

1. Protect and care for those at higher risk, such as healthcare professionals and people with pre-existing conditions, like those with NCDs and immune-compromised illnesses such as cancer.
2. Secure continued and timely access to essential cancer and palliative care medicines and services, avoiding competition with resources required for health emergencies.
3. Provide institutes and health workers with ethical and methodological decision-making guidelines, especially in cases where resources must be re-allocated or are in shortage.
4. Address the needs of cancer patients unable to access cancer services on a timely basis due to travel restrictions or fear of leaving their homes and contracting COVID-19 or one of its variants.
5. Continue to honour the WHO International Year of Health and Care Workers by implementing the World Health Assembly Resolution on 'Protecting, safeguarding and investing in the health and care workforce', essential to ensure an adequate, well-trained, well-resourced, and resilient routine and health emergency workforce.
6. Strengthen real-time data sharing with policy makers, healthcare workers and patients, and improve their health literacy and digital technology skills.

In addition, because people living with NCDs are at higher-risk of worse outcomes of COVID-19 we request WHO and Member States to make the protection of cancer patients through immunisation against COVID-19 a public health priority. We invite Member States to leverage ESMO resources on this topic including [10 statements to address issues and concerns on immunising patients with cancer against COVID-19](#), reinforced by the ['ESMO Call to Action on COVID-19 vaccinations and patients with cancer: Vaccinate. Monitor. Educate.'](#), endorsed to date by over 50 cancer societies and patient organisations. In the context of the Member States developing their vaccination strategies, ESMO would like to request they consider the following:



1. **Vaccinate all cancer patients** in line with the WHO principles and objectives aiming to reduce deaths and disease burden. Patients with active disease or receiving anticancer treatment deserve an additional priority in case of limitations only.
2. **Diligently collect data** via suitable studies and registries to monitor the effects of vaccines in the vulnerable population, including patients with cancer and their immune response.
3. **Educate and instil confidence** among the public and patients in receiving the vaccines and provide them with up-to-date information in lay language.

To support WHO's global efforts, ESMO developed the '[ESMO COVID-19 and Cancer Portal](#)' which includes 'ESMO recommendations for cancer management in the era of COVID-19' for oncology professionals, a guide for patients, a webinar series, an ESMO-CoCARE registry to gather clinical data, and links to WHO norms and guidance.

We encourage Member States to access these ESMO resources on our website www.esmo.org.

We welcome the report's call for stronger engagement with Civil Society Organisations and Non-State Actors like ESMO and its global network of oncology professionals.

Thank you.