

October 18, 2021

Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Dr. Walensky:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), and the more than 49,000 laboratory, translational, and clinical researchers; patient advocates; and other healthcare professionals who constitute our membership, I am writing to thank you for recommending additional COVID-19 vaccinations for people with moderate to severely compromised immune systems, in particular, those with cancer. The AACR also wishes to thank you for recommending COVID-19 boosters for people who work in high-risk occupational and institutional settings. By increasing immunity in medical settings, your support will undoubtedly improve protections for those at great risk of harm and will alleviate the strain on our medical system.

While it is crucial that patients with cancer and the healthcare professionals who care for them have access to additional COVID-19 vaccinations to increase immunity, for many of these patients, residing in a home where other members or caregivers may not be eligible for COVID-19 boosters is still a threat to their health. Patients with cancer and survivors from cancer often have weakened immune systems, such as individuals who are on some form of chemotherapy; transplant patients on immunosuppressive therapies; and people with hereditary or acquired immunodeficiencies. Expanding access to COVID-19 booster vaccinations could greatly decrease the risk for patients with cancer from contracting COVID-19 from members of their household and would provide the best chance of successful treatment. Thus, the AACR encourages you to expand the availability of COVID-19 boosters to caregivers, as well as all those who reside in a household where an individual with cancer is present.

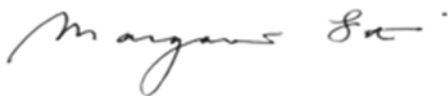
Among patients with cancer, those with hematologic cancers are most in need of this additional level of protection. *Blood Cancer Discovery*, one of the AACR's ten scientific journals, has recently published several studies describing considerable variability in serological response to COVID-19 vaccinations in patients with hematologic malignancies. These studies included a finding that "it [is] clear that patients with hematologic malignancies may not achieve sufficient levels of neutralizing antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 even after repeated

administration of COVID-19 vaccines¹. Therefore, it is imperative that these patients are provided additional means of protection to the virus.” General Colin Powell’s death from COVID-19 sadly underscores the urgency to take such actions to reduce the risk that patients with cancer face from the virus. Reports indicate he had multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer that suppresses the body’s immune response.

It also is important to consider that prolonged COVID-19 infection in immunocompromised individuals such as patients with blood cancer creates opportunities for evolution of viral variants. Therefore, boosting immunity of those sharing households with patients with cancer would help stonewall new viral variants from spreading among the general population.

Thank you for considering the above recommendation. The AACR appreciates your ongoing extraordinary efforts to protect Americans from the COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to serving as a resource to you and your colleagues as we work to achieve our shared mission of saving lives from serious diseases including cancer.

Sincerely,



Margaret Foti, PhD, MD (hc)
Chief Executive Officer
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¹ <https://bloodcancerdiscov.aacrjournals.org/content/early/2021/09/27/2643-3230.BCD-21-0166>