

February 17, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of a broad spectrum of organizations, cancer centers, and other institutions that represent laboratory, translational, and clinical researchers; other health care professionals; millions of patients with cancer and survivors of cancer; and patient advocates, we are writing today to thank you for your extraordinary commitment to conquering cancer and to applaud your determined focus to end the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cancer is a collection of diseases that kills more than 600,000 Americans each year, making it the second leading cause of death in the U.S. There are also more than 17 million survivors of cancer in the U.S., many of whom are at a higher risk of dying from COVID-19. Therefore, we are asking for your assistance in ensuring that patients with active cancer and survivors of cancer are prioritized to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

We fully support your COVID-19 vaccination plan that calls for broadening access and vaccinating as many Americans as rapidly as possible. However, we are compelled to underscore the urgency of prioritizing access to a COVID-19 vaccine for patients with active cancer and survivors of cancer.

There is mounting evidence that patients with cancer are at increased risk of severe illness and death if they are infected with the virus. In December 2020, an article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* presented data showing that patients with cancer who are diagnosed with COVID-19 are more likely to require hospitalization (47.46%) than persons without cancer who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 (24.26%).<sup>1</sup> Also, the AACR COVID-19 and Cancer Task Force recently published an article in the AACR journal [Cancer Discovery](#) that reviewed the available literature since the onset of the pandemic (28 peer-reviewed articles) on fatality rates of patients with cancer who developed COVID-19;<sup>2</sup> these data have shown that COVID-19 fatality rates for patients with cancer were double that of patients without cancer.

Additionally, as noted by the Cancer Leadership Council,<sup>3</sup> a patient-centered forum of national advocacy organizations addressing public policies related to cancer, as well as other recent studies, certain survivors of cancer have a higher probability of infection and COVID-19-related death compared to the general population.<sup>1,3-5</sup> Further, the Council stressed that the risks are even greater for patients with active cancer.

We also know that many Americans are delaying regular doctor appointments that could lead to a diagnosis of cancer, meaning that we are likely to see a higher number of patients diagnosed when their cancers are at a more advanced stage. Without the protection offered by a

vaccine, these patients are not only at risk of being infected with COVID-19, but a COVID-19 diagnosis could also severely impact their available treatment options.

Patients with cancer who are in treatment often receive frequent in-person clinical care, which has the potential to increase their risk of exposure to the virus. Furthermore, certain patients with cancer are vulnerable to infection because of their weakened immune status, which is attributable to their cancers and/or their treatments.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, vaccinating patients with cancer who are in treatment offers the best protection against the threat of contracting the virus.

On January 22, 2021, the Vaccination Advisory Committee of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, an alliance of 30 leading U.S. cancer centers that publishes clinical practice guidelines in oncology, recommended that patients with active cancer as well as their caregivers and household contacts should all be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccination.<sup>7,8</sup>

At the January 27, 2021 meeting of the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, it was reported that certain states in the U.S. are prioritizing patients with active cancer and survivors of cancer in a number of ways. As a result, we want to again emphasize the importance of ensuring that prioritization of vaccine supplies be given to high-risk populations that include patients with active cancer and survivors of cancer.

In closing, for the reasons stated above, we sincerely hope that you and your colleagues in the administration will stress to all State Public Health Departments that patients with active cancer and survivors of cancer must be provided priority access to a lifesaving COVID-19 vaccine. If you have questions or require further information about this issue, please contact the American Association for Cancer Research ([jon.retzlaff@aacr.org](mailto:jon.retzlaff@aacr.org)).

Thank you again for your leadership. We stand ready to work with you and your administration on this critically important issue.

Sincerely,

Abramson Cancer Center at the University of Pennsylvania

American Association for Cancer Research

American Brain Tumor Association

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Inc.

American Liver Foundation

American Radium Society

American Society for Radiation Oncology

American Society of Hematology

ArmorUp for Life

Association for Clinical Oncology  
Association of American Cancer Institutes  
Ben & Catherine Ivy Foundation  
Blue Hat Foundation  
Boston University - Boston Medical Center Cancer Center  
Breast Cancer Research Foundation  
CancerCare  
Cancer Center at Brown University  
Cancer Center at Illinois  
Cancer Forum of the American Public Health Association  
Cancer Support Community  
Cardinal Bernardin Cancer Center, Stritch School of Medicine Loyola University Chicago  
Case Comprehensive Cancer Center at Case Western Reserve University  
Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center at The University of California Irvine  
Children's Cancer Cause  
Cholangiocarcinoma Foundation  
Chris Draft Family Foundation  
City of Hope  
Cleveland Clinic Taussig Cancer Institute  
Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Cancer Center  
Colorectal Cancer Alliance  
Columbia University Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center  
Community Oncology Alliance  
Cure Breast Cancer Foundation  
Dan L. Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center at Baylor College of Medicine  
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute  
Deadliest Cancers Coalition  
Debbie's Dream Foundation  
Duke Cancer Institute  
ECAN Esophageal Cancer Action Network  
ESMO

EVAN Foundation  
Fox Chase Cancer Center  
Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center  
Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center  
Friends of Cancer Research  
Global Liver Institute  
Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center  
Georgia Cancer Center  
GI Cancers Alliance  
GO2 Foundation for Lung Cancer  
Head and Neck Cancer Alliance  
Hope for Stomach Cancer  
Huntsman Cancer Institute at The University of Utah  
Imerman Angels  
Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Comprehensive Cancer Center  
International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer  
International Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia Foundation  
Jackson Laboratory  
Laura and Isaac Perlmutter Cancer Center at NYU Langone Health  
Lazarex Cancer Foundation  
Leukemia & Lymphoma Society  
Livestrong  
Loma Linda University Cancer Center  
Lung Cancer Research Foundation  
LUNgevity  
Masonic Cancer Center, University of Minnesota  
Mays Cancer Center at UT Health San Antonio MD Anderson Cancer Center  
Melanoma Research Foundation  
Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center  
Men's Health Network  
Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation

METAvivor Research and Support  
Moffitt Cancer Center  
Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation  
MUSC Hollings Cancer Center  
National Brain Tumor Society  
National Cancer Registrars Association  
National Comprehensive Cancer Network  
National Pancreas Foundation  
Norris Cotton Cancer Center at Dartmouth  
Oncology Nursing Society  
Ovarian Cancer Research Alliance  
Penn State Cancer Institute  
Raymond Foundation  
Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University  
Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center  
Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey  
Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute  
Sarcoma Foundation of America  
Shepherd Foundation  
Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center at Thomas Jefferson University  
Society for Immunotherapy of Cancer (SITC)  
Society of Surgical Oncology  
St. Baldrick's Foundation  
Stand Up To Cancer  
Stanford Cancer Institute  
Stephenson Cancer Center at The University of Oklahoma  
Students Supporting Brain Tumor Research  
Stupid Cancer, Inc.  
Susan G. Komen  
Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine  
The Advocates for Collaborative Education

The Alliance of Dedicated Cancer Centers

The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center – James Cancer Hospital and Solove  
Research Institute

The Salk Institute

The University of Kansas Cancer Center

Tigerlily Foundation

Triage Cancer

UC Davis Comprehensive Cancer Center

UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center

UCLA Health Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center

UCSF Helen Diller Family Comprehensive Cancer Center

UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center

Unite for HER

University of Arizona Cancer Center

University of Chicago Medicine Comprehensive Cancer Center

University of Cincinnati Cancer Center

University of Iowa Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center

University of Michigan Rogel Cancer Center

University of New Mexico Comprehensive Cancer Center

University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center

University of Rochester Wilmot Cancer Institute

University of Vermont Cancer Center

USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center

UT Southwestern Simmons Cancer Center

V Foundation for Cancer Research

VCU Medical Center

Winship Cancer Institute of Emory University

Yale Cancer Center

ZERO – The End of Prostate Cancer

cc: Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
José Romero, MD, Chairman, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), CDC

## References

- (1) Wang, Q.; Berger, N. A.; Xu, R. Analyses of Risk, Racial Disparity, and Outcomes Among US Patients With Cancer and COVID-19 Infection. *JAMA Oncol.* **2020**, E1–E8. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaoncol.2020.6178>.
- (2) Ribas, A.; Sengupta, R.; Locke, T.; Zaidi, S. K.; Campbell, K. M.; Carethers, J. M.; Jaffee, E. M.; Wherry, E. J.; Soria, J.-C.; D'Souza, G. Priority COVID-19 Vaccination for Patients with Cancer While Vaccine Supply Is Limited. *Cancer Discov.* **2021**, *11* (2), 233–236. <https://doi.org/10.1158/2159-8290.CD-20-1817>.
- (3) Cancer Leadership Council. Letter to CDC ACIP on Prioritizing COVID-19 Vaccinations for Patients with Cancer. **2021**. <https://canceradvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/CLC-to-ACIP-re-Covid-vaccines-cancer-patients-Jan-2021.pdf>.
- (4) Sng, C. C. T.; Wong, Y. N. S.; Wu, A.; Ottaviani, D.; Chopra, N.; Galazi, M.; Benafif, S.; Soosaipillai, G.; Roylance, R.; Lee, A. J. X.; Shaw, H. Cancer History and Systemic Anti-Cancer Therapy Independently Predict COVID-19 Mortality: A UK Tertiary Hospital Experience. *Front. Oncol.* **2020**, *10*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fonc.2020.595804>.
- (5) Williamson, E. J.; Walker, A. J.; Bhaskaran, K.; Bacon, S.; Bates, C.; Morton, C. E.; Curtis, H. J.; Mehrkar, A.; Evans, D.; Inglesby, P.; Cockburn, J.; McDonald, H. I.; MacKenna, B.; Tomlinson, L.; Douglas, I. J.; Rentsch, C. T.; Mathur, R.; Wong, A. Y. S.; Grieve, R.; Harrison, D.; Forbes, H.; Schultze, A.; Croker, R.; Parry, J.; Hester, F.; Harper, S.; Perera, R.; Evans, S. J. W.; Smeeth, L.; Goldacre, B. Factors Associated with COVID-19-Related Death Using OpenSAFELY. *Nature* **2020**, *584* (7821), 430–436. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2521-4>.
- (6) American Cancer Society. Why People with Cancer Are More Likely to Get Infections <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/low-blood-counts/infections/why-people-with-cancer-are-at-risk.html> (accessed Feb 5, 2021).
- (7) Pergam, S.; Baden, L.; Abel, G.; Bunnell, C.; Cinar, P.; Hamdan, A.; Khushalani, N.; Narayana, S.; Papadopoulos, E.; Riely, G.; Saullo, J.; Segal, B.; Tabor, H.; Tan, T.; Zimmer, A.; Carlson, R.; Koh, W.-J. Preliminary Recommendations of the NCCN COVID-19 Vaccination Advisory Committee. **2021**, *National Comprehensive Cancer Network*. [https://www.nccn.org/covid-19/pdf/COVID-19\\_Vaccination\\_Guidance\\_V1.0.pdf](https://www.nccn.org/covid-19/pdf/COVID-19_Vaccination_Guidance_V1.0.pdf).
- (8) Cohen, S. Experts recommend people with cancer be prioritized for a COVID-19 vaccine <https://connect.uclahealth.org/2021/01/25/experts-recommend-people-with-cancer-be-prioritized-for-the-covid-19-vaccine/> (accessed Feb 5, 2021).