



CLL SOCIETY

CLL Society's Official Statement on Mask Wearing and Other Protective Measures for Those Living with Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia/Small Lymphocytic Lymphoma (CLL/SLL) in Healthcare Settings (updated May 2024)

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. All healthcare professionals who come in direct contact with those who are immunocompromised, or those in their immediate household, should minimally wear a surgical mask (and preferably a well-fitting N95 mask).
2. Other reasonable accommodations should be made to lower an immunocompromised patient's risk of contracting COVID-19 infection in the healthcare setting upon request.

CLL Society is the preeminent non-profit organization dedicated to the unmet needs of those living with CLL and SLL. According to both the NIH and the CDC, all individuals diagnosed with CLL/SLL are considered moderately to severely immunocompromised. This is true regardless of their treatment status.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the immunocompromised status of this particular community has been an urgent ongoing concern. While the pandemic might be considered over for some, it remains a real threat to those who are immunocompromised. We are asking for your ongoing help in this regard.

While the risk of a COVID-19 infection overall and particularly those leading to hospitalization and death has significantly receded for all including the immunocompromised, the risk of severe disease and death remains unacceptably high for those who with impaired immunity. For example, one of the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (MMWR) showed that when Omicron was the predominant circulating variant, 69.5% of COVID-19 associated hospitalizations consisted of fully vaccinated immunocompromised individuals.

While there may be disagreement on the general efficacy of mask wearing to reduce COVID-19 infection within the broader population, there is no controversy about the benefit of using a well-fitted N95 (or the equivalent) to protect those who are the most vulnerable among us. We also now know that nosocomial COVID-19 infections are a well-documented major source of SARS-CoV-2 transmission.

For these reasons, CLL Society highly recommends all those on an immunocompromised patient's healthcare team mask up when coming in contact with them. This is a reasonable accommodation that should be made in order to lower their risk of contracting a potentially life-threatening COVID-19 infection while receiving the safe healthcare they both need and deserve.

Additionally, CLL Society recommends that when immunocompromised patients must visit certain healthcare settings (such as urgent care, emergency rooms, or any other situation where an immunocompromised individual might be exposed to potentially ill patients) that reasonable accommodations be made. This should be done in an effort to reduce potential exposure to COVID-19 infection. For example, a reasonable accommodation in this situation might include providing them with a designated, more secluded or better ventilated area, where they can wait in a safer environment.

CLL Society would like to thank all healthcare professionals for their dedication and care throughout the pandemic. And thank you for continuing to protect the most vulnerable individuals who are still among us.

Sincerely,

Brian Koffman, MDCM (retired), MS Ed
Co-Founder, Executive Vice President, & Chief Medical Officer
CLL Society, Inc.