CLL Society’s Official Statement Concerning CLL (chronic lymphocytic leukemia) Patients Working and Traveling During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The CLL Society, the largest patient focused CLL nonprofit organization in the USA, in consultation with members of its medical advisory board and outside experts, continues to urge all people with CLL to strictly avoid being exposed to COVID-19. This means staying home and limiting contact with other people.

We recognize that this sounds draconian and might not always be possible, but all CLL patients, whether young or old, untreated or in a deep remission or with long-term stable disease are immune suppressed. Recent studies show people with CLL are at significantly higher risk than other people for serious and fatal outcomes from COVID-19, possibly as high risk as residents of long-term care facilities.

Our advice remains that all CLL patients aspire to “shelter in place”. What that means is leaving home only for urgent issues such as necessary healthcare visits. We recommend not working except from home. No non-essential travel. If possible, use delivery services or ask friends or family to perform most errands. Outdoor recreation where there is no close contact with others is encouraged as well as home exercise. Do stay in contact with family and friends through video services and phone calls for body, mind, and spiritual health. In person social interactions should be outdoors at distances greater than 6 feet. Masks covering nose and mouth should be worn whenever closer contact occurs and indoors whenever out of the home.

People with CLL should generally not leave home to work where they might be in contact with others. If they absolutely must work in a setting with co-workers, they should go beyond the general public recommendations given from public health organizations. Assume any co-worker may be infectious with COVID-19. Therefore, maintain rigorous social distancing, properly wear a mask and consider a face shield and/or goggle. The risk of spread from communal surfaces such as doorknobs and shared work surfaces is uncertain, but we advise sanitizing, wear disposable gloves or best of all, don’t touch. Frequent hand washing should be performed. Avoiding face touching, even if wearing gloves or a mask.

Specifically, when possible, doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers with CLL should not be providing direct patient care where they might come in contact with patients who are known, suspected or at significant risk of being infected with COVID-19. Since the risk that children can spread COVID-19 remains unknown, we similarly advise teachers, school and preschool workers and others with CLL who have direct contact with children to seek accommodation (e.g. work from home) until we have definitive data. The safety for those with CLL in sending their children in school is fraught with uncertainties. Based on the high risk for CLL patients who contract SARS-CoV-2, the CLL Society recommends that schools offer a virtual option for these children while the pandemic is still active.

This is stricter than the recommendations for the general population, but people with CLL are in a high-risk group. As always, our motto is: Smart Patients Get Smart Care™. Here we are highlighting smart self-care! These general guidelines should be interpreted in light of your local COVID-19 risk and circumstances. Things are changing fast and we will update as needed at www.CLLSociety.org.

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The CLL Society Inc. is a patient-centric, physician-curated nonprofit focused on patient education, support and research. Dedicated to addressing the unmet needs of the CLL and related blood cancer communities, the CLL Society explains the rapidly changing therapeutic landscape and the importance of clinical trials, builds patient support groups, educates patients and providers, and does patient focused CLL research.