

Cancer diagnosis and treatment remain on track despite COVID-19 restrictions in September

COVID-19 restrictions did not impact the number of people diagnosed with cancer in September, or the number of people receiving treatment for cancer, according to the most recent monitoring report released by Te Aho o Te Kahu, the Cancer Control Agency.

The dip in cancer registrations seen during August 2021 has resolved with an increase in new diagnoses of cancer in September 2021.

There was disruption to some diagnostic procedures in September, most notably in the Auckland region.

However, the overall impact of COVID-19 on diagnoses is considerably less than the disruption seen in April and May 2020.

"The latest report shows a health system that is learning how to safely deliver cancer services in the context of COVID-19," chief executive of Te Aho o Te Kahu Professor Diana Sarfati said.

"I would like to thank everyone in the cancer sector for working tirelessly to ensure whānau with cancer can be diagnosed, and undergo cancer treatment, at all alert levels."

A focus for the Agency is to ensure COVID-19 does not increase inequities in access to cancer services for Māori, given the likelihood of Māori being adversely impacted by the outbreak.

"Our monitoring shows that Māori cancer patients are receiving cancer treatment at the levels we expect, which is reassuring," Professor Sarfati said.

Within the Auckland region, COVID-19 caused some disruption to gastrointestinal endoscopies across the region in both August and September.

Publicly funded cancer treatment – including surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy – continued across the Auckland region in August and September 2021.

"A cancer diagnosis is hard anytime, let alone when there is a global pandemic. I know the ongoing outbreak continues to cause stress and anxiety for those living with cancer and their whānau."

"It is encouraging there has been only a minimal impact on cancer services in Auckland to date."

Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 is essential for those living with cancer. It is vital cancer patients and their whānau who have not yet been vaccinated do so immediately.

"The vaccine is safe for cancer patients and is an important part of staying healthy for people with cancer. If you have not yet been vaccinated, please book online or call your doctor to arrange an appointment."

Te Aho o Te Kahu will continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on cancer diagnosis and treatment. The next report will focus on data from October and will be released next month.