

Medical Imaging and Coronavirus (COVID-19) Safety

Researchers and radiologists at several prominent health care organizations are cautioning doctors that patients may experience swollen lymph nodes following COVID-19 vaccination.

Swollen lymph nodes are a common occurrence when vaccination prompts a strong immune response. **On mammography and chest images, this can mimic the appearance of serious conditions like cancer.** If you need to undergo breast or chest imaging, tell your doctor about your vaccination history prior to your exam.

You should also schedule your annual screening mammogram either before or at least 6 weeks after your final COVID-19 vaccination to reduce the need for additional testing. However, if you are having breast symptoms, do not delay your mammogram.

Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about COVID-19 vaccine side effects and whether you should reschedule an upcoming exam.

For more information about breast and chest imaging, see the Mammography (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/mammo>) and Chest CT (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/chestct>) pages.

Is it Safe to Have an Imaging Exam Now?

As vaccines become more widely available, every state in the U.S. is beginning to ease lockdown restrictions. Hospital radiology departments, imaging centers, and other facilities are opening to increase the availability of general medical care, including imaging exams that were delayed due to the pandemic.

Radiologists and other health professionals share the public's concerns about safety, especially when it comes to seeking medical care unrelated to COVID-19. In response to these concerns, the medical community is taking extra precautions to reduce the risk of virus exposure as much as possible.

Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns about seeking medical care or undergoing medical imaging. In most cases, the benefit of medical care and imaging to your overall health far outweighs any possible risk of infection.

How is My Imaging Facility Practicing COVID Safety?

Imaging facilities have modified their internal procedures to help manage the flow of patients and minimize the risk of COVID exposure. Safety measures may differ between facilities. **Call your imaging facility staff before your exam if you have concerns about how they will maintain your safety.** The staff will likely:

- Follow strict workplace safety guidelines, including staff PPE, social distancing, hand washing regimens, etc.
- Conduct health checks at all entrances to identify all individuals displaying COVID symptoms
- Limit or bar visitors to reduce possible exposure
- Thoroughly clean exam rooms between patients
- Use high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration in exam rooms and allow time for multiple air exchanges between patient exams via air circulation
- Regulate social distancing in waiting rooms and other spaces

- Extend hours of operation and stagger patient appointment times to maintain social distancing and help provide time for thorough cleaning between exams

Always tell your facility before you arrive if you have any COVID symptoms and if you have been in physical contact with anyone who has COVID-19. This will help staff make your visit as safe as possible for everyone.

If you have COVID symptoms, the imaging staff will likely isolate you and make special arrangements to safely perform your exam. For example, some patients may be scanned within an isolation room using portable equipment. Chest x-rays and other exams may be performed through the glass window of an isolation room.

Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about COVID safety or symptoms. Many patients search the Internet for the answers to their questions. However, it is important to note that much of the COVID information on the Internet is false and potentially dangerous. Be sure to only consult trusted, recognized sources of credible information, such as RadiologyInfo.org (<https://www.radiologyinfo.org/>), the World Health Organization (WHO) (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>), and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<https://www.cdc.gov/>). For more information, visit:

- Pneumonia (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/pneumonia>) (*RadiologyInfo.org*)
- Chest CT (<http://www.radiologyinfo.org/en/info/chestct>) (*RadiologyInfo.org*)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: About Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html>)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: COVID-19 Fact Sheet (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/2019-ncov-factsheet.pdf>)
- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: What To Do If You're Sick With COVID-19 Fact Sheet (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/sick-with-2019-nCoV-fact-sheet.pdf>)

If you still have questions or concerns about COVID symptoms and/or safety, **talk to your doctor and your medical imaging facility staff before your appointment.**

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