

Free special home air filters for cancer patients to help prevent COVID | Here's how to get one

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COVID cases have been on the rise in Southeast Louisiana since June, with more children and adults going to the emergency room for treatment, but doctors are not seeing an increase in this latest COVID wave taking lives.

Still, people with cancer need to take extra precautions to avoid infection.

And now they can get help with a special, free kit to keep cancer patients safe.

People who are getting treated for cancer need to be extra cautious about catching COVID.

"Not only is COVID an acute risk for people with cancer, it's also a long-term risk," explained Dr. Michael Hoerger, Director of Population Sciences and Disparities for the Tulane Cancer Center and Co-Director for Population Sciences and Disparities for the Louisiana Cancer Research Center.

"So, one of the biggest risk factors for long COVID is ever having had cancer," explained Dr. Hoerger said.

And right now, researcher Dr. Hoerger says the risk has gone up substantially in the last few months.

"It's very bad out there. There's about a million infections a day in the U.S. based on wastewater surveillance data transmissions particularly high in the west and the south," he said.

And Louisiana is one of the states with the highest rates of active COVID. In fact, four percent of people are infectious right now.

So, Dr. Hoerger is the only one in the country leading a pilot project called COVICan. He's distributing free kits to people with active cancer to help prevent one of the places COVID is spreading. That's in the home among family members.

"Early in the pandemic, people thought that COVID was spread mainly through droplets, by touching surfaces, and then touching your face, and we now know that that's not true. Ninety-nine-point-ninety-nine percent of transmission is through the air," he said.

So, here's what you get, free: special fans with high-end filters to purify any COVID virus droplets circulating in your home, five rapid tests to catch it early, and 50 N95 masks.

Those are the protective ones because they have no gaps. And just like Plexiglass and the few-foot social distancing rule of the past, those regular surgical masks do not help, because you're just breathing the regular air coming in through all the gaps.

So, why are the new Omicron subvariants, called FLiRT, surging now?

"Right now, people could view it as more infectious, because a lot of people have not been infected in a while, have not had a vaccine in a very long while, Dr. Hoerger said.

"And also people are not taking very many precautions. The CDC lowered the isolation policy to one day. A lot of people aren't testing anymore," he explained.

COVID-19 can mean cancer patients have to temporarily discontinue their treatment. Also, their immune systems are not strong, and a vaccine for the FLiRT COVID variants is not due out until the fall.

The kits are for patients being treated for cancer now, anywhere in the U.S.

Recipients must first complete a survey before receiving the kit and they are surveyed during the program.

Cancer patients can obtain a kit by emailing Dr. Hoerger: mhoerger@tulane.edu or calling 504-544-9001 or click here.

COVICan: <http://covican.com/>