

# Implications of COVID-19 for patients with pre-existing digestive diseases

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## Introduction:

COVID-19 has implications for the management of patients with pre-existing digestive diseases. These diseases include gastrointestinal cancer and Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) which are often treated with immunosuppressive agents that can lead to an increased risk of infection.

## Objectives:

Based on the impact of COVID-19 on the management of patients with digestive diseases, a panel of digestive disease experts from the Chinese Society of IBD, Chinese Elite IBD Union and Chinese IBD Quality of Care Evaluation Center Committee developed clinical practice guidelines for the care of patients with gastrointestinal cancer and IBD.

## Expert Opinion Recommendations:

### Gastrointestinal cancer

Gastrointestinal cancer patients are often immunosuppressed due to their underlying condition and medical treatment, leaving them vulnerable to infection. It is recommended that patient-specific decisions be made on the continued administration of chemotherapy and surgery during the COVID-19 epidemic.

### Inflammatory Bowel Disease

The management of patients with IBD includes the use of immunosuppressive drugs and biologics. Based on the potential for immunosuppression, recommendations have been issued to postpone elective surgery and endoscopy and encourage telemedicine to reduce the risk of infection. If emergent surgery is required, screening for COVID-19 is recommended prior to surgery.

Current medications (i.e. mesalamine, corticosteroids, biologics) for patients with IBD can be continued, but new prescriptions for immunosuppressants or the janus kinase inhibitor Tofacitinib should not be initiated in epidemic areas. The use of monoclonal antibodies (Infliximab, Vedolizumab, Ustekinumab) can be continued unless treatment requires intravenous infusion in an outpatient setting.

Consider the use of enteral nutrition if biologics are not available.

Patients with fever should contact their physician for clinical evaluation.

### General Guidance

All patients should follow strict personal protection protocols.

## Discussion:

The comorbidity spectrum of digestive conditions and its impact on treatment and outcome of COVID-19 remains largely unknown. These recommendations are issued to provide guidance on the management of patients with digestive diseases during the COVID-19 epidemic.

## Conclusion:

**The continuation and optimization of care for patients with digestive diseases is critical to ensure optimal clinical outcomes.**

### Summary prepared by Nestlé Health Science.

The complete study may be accessed online:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/gutjnl-2020-321013>