

## Medicine for COVID-19 does not raise risk of other infections

### Tocilizumab is already used in people with cancer after CAR T-cell therapy

A medicine being studied to treat breathing problems from COVID-19 has already been shown to help people with a different breathing problem due to cytokine release syndrome (CRS).

That's according to new research on the medicine tocilizumab (toci for short) for CRS.

Unlike COVID-19, CRS is not a virus. Here's how it happens. Some people with lymphoma and other blood cancers are treated with chimeric antigen receptor T cells (CAR T). Although CAR T cells fight cancer, they can cause short-term but serious side effects called CRS.

CRS can include serious breathing problems similar to COVID-19. Toci can treat CRS.

Toci was originally made to treat another disease, rheumatoid arthritis. People who took toci for about 2 years got more infections (sick from germs) than average, according to the manufacturer.

However, people with COVID-19 or with CRS take toci for only weeks, not years. Researchers wondered whether people who take toci for a shorter time would still get more infections.

Researchers looked at medical records of about 400 people with cancer who got CRS after CAR T-cell therapy. There were two groups of people: one group got toci, and the other group did not. Both groups had equal rates of infections.

**Taking tocilizumab for a short time might not cause more infections.** That is good news for the first round of research, but more studies are needed.

### Keep in mind

Although CRS and COVID-19 can cause similar severe breathing problems, they are not the same disease. This study did not include anyone who had COVID-19 or who was on a ventilator. It was not a clinical trial and did not show whether toci will help COVID-19.

### What's next

The Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research (CIBMTR) is studying how COVID-19 affects people who receive CAR T cells and blood or marrow transplant (BMT). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CIBMTR has fast-tracked this research and will share findings as soon as possible.



### Learn more about

- [CAR T cell therapy](https://www.bethematch.org) at BeTheMatch.org
- [COVID-19 research](https://www.cibmtr.org) at CIBMTR.org
- More [study summaries](https://www.cibmtr.org) at CIBMTR.org

### About this research summary

This information is provided on behalf of the Consumer Advocacy Committee of the CIBMTR<sup>®</sup> (Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research<sup>®</sup>).

### Source

Frigault MJ, Nikiforow S, Mansour M. [Tocilizumab not associated with increased infection risk after CAR T - Implications for COVID-19?](https://doi.org/10.1182/blood.2020006216) Blood [In Press, available online 26 May 2020] doi:10.1182/blood.2020006216

