

Protecting cancer patients from COVID-19: World-first trial tests novel immune-booster

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Dr. Rebecca Auer is leading a world-first clinical trial of a novel immune-boosting strategy to protect cancer patients from developing severe COVID-19 and other dangerous lung infections. Credit: The Ottawa Hospital

In the race to find new ways to prevent and treat COVID-19, Canadian researchers have launched an innovative clinical trial focussed on strengthening the immune system for one of the most vulnerable populations—cancer patients.

The trial involves IMM-101, a preparation of safe, heat-killed bacteria that broadly stimulates the innate, or 'first-response,' arm of the [immune system](#). The researchers hope that boosting [cancer](#) patients' immune systems with IMM-101 will protect them from developing severe COVID-19 and other dangerous lung infections.

Researchers from The Ottawa Hospital came up with the idea for the trial and worked with the Canadian Cancer Trials Group (CCTG) at Queen's University to design and run it in centers across the country. Funding and in-kind support, valued at \$2.8 million, is being provided by the Canadian Cancer Society, BioCanRx, the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research, The Ottawa Hospital

Foundation, The Ottawa Hospital Academic Medical Organization, ATGen Canada/NKMax, and Immodulon Therapeutics, the manufacturer of IMM-101.

"An effective vaccine that provides specific protection against COVID-19 could take another year or more to develop, test, and implement," says Dr. Rebecca Auer, study lead, surgical oncologist and Director of Cancer Research at The Ottawa Hospital and associate professor at the University of Ottawa. "In the meantime, there is an urgent need to protect people with cancer from severe COVID-19 infection, and we think this immune stimulator, IMM-101, may be able to do this."

"We know the immune systems of [cancer patients](#) are compromised both by their disease and the treatments they receive placing them at much higher risk of severe complications from COVID-19," says Dr. Chris O'Callaghan, CCTG Senior Investigator, who will be overseeing this important national trial. "These patients are unable to practice social isolation due to the need to regularly attend hospital to receive critically important cancer treatment."

The trial, called CCTG IC.8, has been approved by Health Canada and is expected to open at cancer centers across Canada this summer. People who are interested in participating should speak with their cancer specialist.

Provided by The Ottawa Hospital

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