

# Cancer does not wait: safeguarding care for pediatric acute lymphoblastic leukemia patients during the COVID-19 pandemic in a Mexican hospital.

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Safeguarding care of acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) patients during the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a significant challenge to health systems. We documented continuity (timeliness and compliance) of curative treatment in pediatric ALL patients, and the incidence and outcomes of patients infected with SARS-Cov2 in our institution. **Materials and methods:** We included all ALL patients aged <16 years who received treatment in “Hospital Universitario Dr. José Eleuterio Gonzalez” from March 2020 to June 2021. The causes of non-compliance and the outcomes of patients with COVID-19 were reported. **Results:** We analyzed 553 visits from 89 patients with ALL. Chemotherapy administration was timely and compliant with our treatment protocol in 83% (n=459) of the records reviewed. Treatment continuity goals of [?]80% were achieved for all treatment phases, except for the consolidation (66%) and intermediate maintenance phases (60%). The main causes of treatment delays or treatment modifications included lack of financial resources (2.5%), lack of inpatient beds (1.8%) and chemotherapy stock-outs (1.3%), and the treatment abandonment rate was 3.3%. Twenty-two patients (24.7%) were diagnosed with COVID-19. Of these, seven (32%) developed pneumonia, five (22.7%) required oxygen, and two (9%) developed multisystem inflammatory syndrome. For patients with COVID-19, the median length of stay was 9.5 days, and the 30-day mortality rate was 4.5%. **Discussion:** The continuity of curative treatment for ALL in the context of COVID-19 was >80% in our hospital. Adapting diagnosis and treatment protocols and implementing strategies to minimize the risk of infection were fundamental to safeguarding continuity care for cancer patients.

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