How to differentiate lung cancer from COVID-19

An infographic for healthcare professionals by Lung Cancer Clinical Expert Group (CEG) and secretariat Roy Castle Lung Foundation

Any of these red-flag lung cancer symptoms?
- haemoptysis
- chest pain
- weight loss
- appetite loss

And any other findings?
- finger clubbing
- neck nodes / supraclavicular nodes
- chest signs consistent with lung cancer
- thrombocytosis

Consider lung cancer risk factors:
- smoking
- Age
- Asbestos exposure

LUNG CANCER Features more suggestive of lung cancer:
- Unexplained / Persistent Cough
- Unexplained / Persistent Breathlessness
- Duration > 4 weeks
- Fatigue

COVID-19 Features more suggestive of COVID-19:
- Acute onset

Other red-flag COVID-19 symptoms?
- Fever
- Myalgia
- Loss of smell
- Loss of taste
- Initial flu-like symptoms for 1-2 weeks with onset of respiratory symptoms from 7-10 days
- Close contact with a confirmed/ highly suspected case of COVID-19

ACTION
1. Arrange an urgent swab for SARS-CoV-2 PCR, and;
2. If symptoms require urgent attention, consider emergency admission.

PCR Positive
Manage according to current COVID-19 guidelines and review after 2 weeks if hospital admission not required.

PCR Negative
Refer for chest X-Ray or direct to lung cancer service for CT (await PCR negative result prior to imaging and follow local COVID-19 guidelines)

INDETERMINATE FEATURES
- Cough, unclear onset and persistence
- Breathing difficulty, unclear onset and persistence
- Flu-like symptoms lasting longer than 3 weeks
- Fatigue with duration <4 weeks
- Unclear if any fever
- Feeling of chest tightness
- Difficulty in taking a deep breath
- Recurrent chest infections with possible features of COVID-19
- No other clear red flag symptoms

Emergency
If symptoms require urgent attention, consider emergency admission.

1. Manage according to current COVID-19 guidelines.
2. Consider differential diagnosis.
3. If symptoms require urgent attention, consider emergency admission.

ACTION
1. Manage according to current COVID-19 guidelines and review after 2 weeks hospital admission not required.
2. Ask patient to self-isolate as per current guidance.

If symptoms require urgent attention, consider emergency admission.

Persistent Symptoms
If persistent, refer as lung cancer symptoms left.

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