



New CDC Program Created To Help Cancer Patients Prevent Infections

(NAPSA)—There is important news for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. A new program has been created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help cancer patients prevent infections stemming from their cancer treatment.

While chemotherapy can be an important part of a patient's treatment for cancer, it can also damage infection-fighting white blood cells. A low white blood cell count, or neutropenia, can put cancer patients undergoing treatment at greater risk of developing a serious infection.¹

In fact, it's estimated that each year, 60,000 cancer patients are hospitalized for chemotherapy-related infections and one patient dies every two hours from this complication.²

To address this public health issue, the CDC has introduced a comprehensive program, called *Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients*. The program's educational resources are designed to help reduce the risk of developing potentially life-threatening infections during chemotherapy treatment. These resources include:³

• **Three Steps Toward Preventing Infections During Cancer Treatment**—a website for patients and caregivers featuring an interactive risk assessment tool and educational materials to help prepare, prevent and protect cancer patients against potentially life-threatening infections.

• **Basic Infection Control and Prevention Plan for Outpatient Oncology Settings**—guidelines for evidence-based infection prevention practices in outpatient oncology settings, where more than 1 million cancer



Chemotherapy-related infections can pose a serious threat to cancer patients.¹ Fortunately, there are steps patients can take.

patients receive chemotherapy and radiation therapy each year.⁴

The program was developed by experts from the CDC's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control and the Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion in collaboration with experts in the field of oncology and infection control.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Infection?^{5,6,7}

Many times, fever may be our body's only sign of an infection. That is why it's very important that chemotherapy patients call their doctor immediately if they have a temperature of 100.4° F or higher for more than one hour, or a one-time temperature of 101° F or higher. While developing a fever is a very serious side effect and should be treated as an emergency, there are several other signs or symptoms you should be aware of that may indicate you have an infection:

- Chills and sweats
- Change in cough or new cough
- Sore throat or new mouth sore
- Shortness of breath
- Nasal congestion

- Stiff neck
- Burning or pain with urination
- Redness, soreness, or swelling in any area, including surgical wounds and ports
- Diarrhea or vomiting

If you experience any of these signs or symptoms as a patient being treated with chemotherapy you should call your doctor immediately.

Washing Your Hands is Key⁸

Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent infections. This should include you, all members of your household, your doctors, nurses and anyone who comes into close contact with you. Don't be afraid to ask people to wash their hands.

Washing your hands with soap and water is most effective, but it's OK to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

You should wash your hands:

- Before, during and after cooking food
- Before you eat
- After going to the bathroom
- After changing diapers or helping a child to use the bathroom
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing

Also, remember to use disinfectants to keep your household surfaces free of germs.⁹

This program was made possible through a CDC Foundation partnership with Amgen. Amgen provided funding and its oncology expertise to the CDC Foundation.

To learn more about *Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients*, visit www.preventcancerinfections.org or www.cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections.

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