

Preventing Infections In Cancer Patients

# My Pocket Guide



A quick guide to CDC's  
**Basic Infection  
Control and  
Prevention Plan  
For Outpatient  
Oncology Settings**  
And Patient Education  
Resources

National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases

Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion





## My Pocket Guide

*My Pocket Guide* is your quick reference for protecting cancer patients and healthcare personnel from infections. It was developed for outpatient oncology facilities as a quick reference guide to CDC's *Basic Infection Control and Prevention Plan for Outpatient Oncology Settings*. The full plan contains policies and procedures to meet minimal expectations of patient protections as described in CDC's *Guide to Infection Prevention for Outpatient Settings*.



*Guide to Infection Prevention for Outpatient Settings* is available at:

[www.cdc.gov/HAI/settings/outpatient/outpatient-settings.html](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/settings/outpatient/outpatient-settings.html)

## Healthcare Challenge

As a healthcare provider, you know that patients receiving chemotherapy are at risk for developing infections that may lead to hospitalization, disruptions in chemotherapy schedules and, in some cases, death.

## Tools and Intervention Strategy

*Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients* is a comprehensive initiative, led by CDC and the CDC Foundation, to reduce infections by raising awareness among patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers about steps they can take to protect themselves during chemotherapy treatment.

## Your Role Within Your Facility

### Be vigilant.

If you suspect an infection in a patient, it is your responsibility to report it to the appropriate personnel so that proper diagnostic work-up and treatment can be provided to the patient. Maintaining vigilance for infections can also help detect outbreaks early.

### You have a responsibility.

Every staff member has an important role in preventing infections in cancer patients by following Standard Precautions, which are the minimum infection prevention measures that apply to all patient care.

## Quick Guide Section

The elements in the following Quick Guide section are taken from CDC's *Basic Infection Control and Prevention Plan for Outpatient Oncology Settings*, which is based on CDC's evidence-based guidelines and guidelines from professional societies.

### Hand Hygiene

- Alcohol-based hand rub is the preferred method for decontaminating your hands, *except* when hands are visibly soiled (e.g., dirt, blood, body fluids), or after caring for patients with known or suspected infectious diarrhea

(e.g., *Clostridium difficile*, norovirus), in which case soap and water should be used.

- Perform hand hygiene before and after glove removal.



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## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- PPE (e.g., gloves, gowns, facemasks) should be worn if there is potential for exposure to blood, body fluids (e.g., respiratory secretions, wound drainage), mucous membranes, nonintact skin or contaminated equipment.
- Choose the type of PPE based on the anticipated nature of the patient interaction and/or the likely mode(s) of transmission.
- Perform hand hygiene before and after removing PPE.
- PPE should be removed before exiting the patient environment.



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## Respiratory Hygiene

- Identify and triage patients and visitors with respiratory symptoms upon entry to the facility, especially during flu season.
- Know your facility's sick leave policies.
- Healthcare personnel with a respiratory infection should avoid direct patient contact; if this is not possible, then a facemask should be worn while providing patient care and frequent hand hygiene should be performed.
- Institute measures to prevent spread of respiratory infections, including:
  - Separating patients and using face masks
  - Ensuring availability of infection control supplies for patient and healthcare personnel use (e.g., alcohol-based hand rub dispensers, facemasks, tissues)



## Injection Safety/ Medication Handling

- Use aseptic technique\* when preparing and administering chemotherapy or other parenteral medications.
- Prepare parenteral medications as close as possible to the time of administration.
- Never administer medications from the same syringe to more than one patient, even if the needle is changed.
- After a syringe or needle has been used to enter or connect to a patient's IV, it is contaminated and should not be used on another patient or to enter a medication vial.
- Do not administer medications from single-dose or single-use vials or bags or bottles of intravenous solution to more than one patient.
- Assign medications packaged as multi-dose vials to a single patient whenever possible.
- Wear a facemask when placing a catheter or injecting material into the epidural or subdural space.



\*Aseptic technique is used by health care workers to prevent the contamination of clean areas, equipment, and sterile medications. This will help prevent the spread of infection.

## Central Venous Catheter Access

- Use aseptic technique when accessing patients' central venous catheters. This includes performing hand hygiene and ensuring an appropriate antiseptic agent is properly applied prior to accessing the catheter. Central venous catheters include:
  - Peripherally inserted central catheters (PICCs)
  - Tunneled catheters
  - Implanted ports



## Environmental Cleaning

- Regularly perform environmental cleaning, focusing on high-touch surfaces when cleaning patient-care areas, such as patient chairs and IV poles in chemotherapy suites and exam tables in patient exam rooms.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting environmental surfaces and medical devices; ensure that the cleaning product used is compatible with the surface or device being cleaned.



*My Pocket Guide is adapted from: Basic Infection Control and Prevention Plan for Outpatient Oncology Settings 2011. Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2011. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/settings/outpatient/basic-infection-control-prevention-plan-2011/>*



## Your Role With Your Patients

Empower your patients. Ensure your patients are armed with the right tools and information to protect themselves against infections.

Use our Talking Points on the next page as a guide to help you empower and educate your patients.

1. As well as killing cancer cells, the chemotherapy you have been receiving kills the white blood cells in your body. You are at greater risk for developing an infection when your white blood cell count is low. This condition, called neutropenia, is common after receiving chemotherapy.
2. White blood cells are one of the body's major defenses against infection.
3. For patients with neutropenia, an infection can become serious quickly.
4. During your chemotherapy treatment, I encourage you to learn the 3 steps toward preventing infections:

**STEP 1. PREPARE:** Treat a fever as an emergency, and call the office right away if you develop a fever....even after hours.

**STEP 2. PREVENT:** Clean your hands, and don't be afraid to ask everyone around you to clean their hands as well.

**STEP 3. PROTECT:** Know the signs and symptoms of an infection and what to do if you develop any of these signs or symptoms.

5. Visit **[PreventCancerInfections.org](http://PreventCancerInfections.org)**: This Web site was developed for cancer patients and caregivers. It features a short questionnaire and identifies your personal risk level for developing neutropenia and potentially life-threatening infections. It also offers information and action steps on how to protect yourself from infections.

# Patient Education Resources

To help raise awareness about the importance of preventing infections in cancer patients, CDC developed the following resources:



**Basic Infection Control and Prevention Plan for Outpatient Oncology Settings** - document developed for outpatient oncology facilities to serve as a model for an infection control plan.



**PreventCancerInfections.org** - an evidence-based, interactive web site designed to help assess a cancer patient's risk for developing neutropenia and subsequent infections.



**Educational resources** - including fact sheets, posters, infographics and more.



To learn more about these resources, please visit [PreventCancerInfections.org/content/program-materials](https://www.preventcancerinfections.org/content/program-materials).

*Many of the materials listed above may be downloaded, copied or distributed without alteration or ordered **free of charge**.*

# Notes

*Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients* content was developed by CDC. Amgen provided its oncology expertise to the CDC Foundation which CDC considered in the development of these resources. This program was made possible through a CDC Foundation partnership with, and funding from, Amgen.