

New CDC Program Created To Help Cancer Patients Prevent Infections



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There is important news for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. Did you know that one of the most dangerous side effects of chemotherapy cannot be seen? That's right; a low white blood cell count puts cancer patients at a higher risk for getting an infection. This condition, called neutropenia, is common after receiving chemotherapy.

While chemotherapy can be an important part of a patient's treatment for cancer, it can also damage infection-fighting white blood cells. So, when a cancer patient's white blood cell count dips too low during their chemotherapy treatment, so does their immune system, increasing their risk of infection. An infection in people with cancer is an emergency. 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.

What are the signs and symptoms of an infection?

While fever may be the only symptom you have, it's important that you know other signs and symptoms you might experience if an infection is looming. The CDC suggests you call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

- Fever- a temperature of 100.4° F or higher for more than 1 hour, or a one-time temperature of 101° F or higher.
- 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
- Unusual vaginal discharge or irritation
- Redness, soreness, or swelling in any area, including surgical wounds and ports
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Pain in the abdomen or rectum
- New onset of pain
- Changes in skin, urination or mental status

What can I do to protect myself against infections?

One of the best ways to prevent infections is to clean your hands often. 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. Use soap and water to wash your hands, but it's OK to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

To help address this problem, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed the Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients program. The program includes two new educational tools for people with cancer, their caregivers and their healthcare providers. These resources include:

- Preventcancerinfections.org **Web site** - developed for patients and caregivers featuring a questionnaire and interactive educational materials to help them prepare, prevent and protect themselves against potentially life-threatening infections.
- [Basic Infection Control and Prevention Plan for Outpatient Oncology Settings](#)—developed for healthcare providers and facility administrators; the plan includes key infection control policies and procedures to be used by outpatient oncology settings, where more than one million patients receive cancer treatment.

For education materials and additional information, please visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections.

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For more information, visit CDC's Web site at www.cdc.gov/24-7.

CDC 24/7: Saving lives. Protecting people. Saving money through prevention.