

Flu Vaccine and Cancer Treatment

Patient and Family Information Sheet

People receiving cancer treatment often wonder if they can get the flu vaccine. This handout includes general information about the flu vaccine for people receiving cancer treatment. Talk to your cancer care team if you have any questions or concerns.

Can I get the flu vaccine if I am receiving cancer treatment?

It is safe to get the flu vaccine by injection (shot- given with a needle) if you are receiving cancer treatment. The injected flu vaccine uses a dead virus.

You should not get the nasal spray flu vaccine if you are receiving cancer treatment. The nasal spray is made from a live vaccine. A live vaccine contains a weakened living virus, which can cause serious illness in people with a weakened immune system.

When is the best time to get the flu shot if I am on cancer treatment?

- ✓ Before you start your cancer treatment, if possible.
- ✓ If you are currently receiving **chemotherapy**, the best time to get the flu shot is 48 hours before or after treatment. This is when your blood counts are still near the normal range.
- ✓ If you are going to be receiving **radiation**, the best time to get the flu shot is before starting treatment. If you have already started radiation treatment, please wait until you have completed radiation to get your flu shot.

Cancer Centre of
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Is there anyone who should not get the flu shot?

Do not get the flu shot if you:

- × Are allergic to any of the vaccine components
- × Have a very low platelet count
- × Are currently undergoing a stem cell or bone marrow transplant
- × Are on immune therapy (talk to your cancer care team first)

Should my family and household members get the flu vaccine?

It is safe for family and household members to get the flu vaccine. If you have a weakened immune system, the flu vaccine is recommended for family and household members. This will help reduce your exposure to the flu.

Family and household members can safely get the nasal spray, unless the person with cancer is severely immunosuppressed after a stem cell or bone marrow transplant.

If you have any questions or concerns, talk to your cancer care team before getting any vaccinations.