

Important Information About Cancer and the Flu

You play an important role in protecting yourself from infections. Cancer and cancer treatments can cause a weakened immune system and reduce your ability to fight infections. Cancer patients are at a higher risk for getting the flu and having more severe infections. Here are things you can do to help protect yourself from colds, flu and other illnesses spread by contact with germs.

- **Get a flu vaccine every year.** If you are 6 months of age and older. Flu shots help your immune system identify and fight certain infections or diseases. It is important to talk with your cancer doctor (oncologist) about getting a flu shot. Your doctor will decide what is best for you based on your current treatment plan, physical condition, and if there are medical reasons for you not to have the flu shot.
- **Family and friends should get a flu shot.** Encourage anyone you spend a lot of time with to get a flu shot. This will help prevent you from coming into contact with these germs.
- **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.** The flu is spread mainly from person to person through coughing, sneezing, and being too close when talking to someone with the flu. Covering your mouth and nose helps keep your germs from spreading to those around you. Put your used tissues in the trash and be sure to wash your hands often. Sneeze into your sleeve or elbow if you do not have a tissue.
- **Wash your hands often to help protect you from germs.** Wash the front and back of your hands and between your fingers for at least 15 seconds. Turn off the faucet with a paper towel.



This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

Be sure to wash your hands:

- ▶ After using the bathroom
 - ▶ Before and after eating or handling food
 - ▶ After sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose
 - ▶ Before and after changing a baby's diapers
- **Use alcohol based hand sanitizer** if soap and water are not available.
 - **Do not touch your eyes, nose and mouth.** Germs are often spread when you touch something that has germs on it and then you touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
 - **Do not have close contact with others.** Do not kiss, hug or shake hands with anyone who is sick, even children. If you are visiting the hospital and have a cough, you should wear a mask to protect others.
 - **Get a good night's sleep.** You should get at least 7 hours or more of sleep each day.
 - **Exercise each day.** Regular exercise several times a week can help keep your body strong and healthy. Talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise plan.
 - **Eat a healthy diet, and drink plenty of fluids each day.** Talk with your doctor or a dietitian to help you with healthy meal planning.

For More Information

To learn more about the flu, you can call your local health department or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at 1-800-232-4636 or visit their website at www.cdc.gov/flu.