

- Chills or sweats
- Diarrhoea or vomiting
- Burning or pain when passing urine
- Passing urine more frequently or no urine output for over 12 hours
- Unusual vaginal discharge or irritation
- Pain in your tummy or back passage
- Any new pain

### Why?

When your white cell blood count is low, the slightest sign or symptom of an infection may be serious. If you suffer from any of the symptoms listed above, contact your hospital doctor or nurse immediately or get a family member or friend to call.

**Your white blood cell count is likely to be at its lowest 7 to 12 days after you finish each chemotherapy cycle and this low count can last for up to a week.**

Infection during chemotherapy can be very serious and the staff in the hospital will be happy to help you with any queries.

It is important to ensure you continue contact with family and friends during your treatment. However, it is important to avoid contact with family, friends or others who have diarrhoea, vomiting, colds or influenza (Flu), chickenpox or shingles or who you know to have an infection.

### Flu vaccination

A flu vaccination is your best way of preventing flu.

- **Are you vaccinated?**
- **Is your vaccination up to date?**
- **Are the people you come in contact with vaccinated?**
- **Are your family, friends, colleagues or health care personnel vaccinated?**

**Don't be afraid to ask**

### Hospital contact numbers

- Day Unit Hours: Monday-Friday

- Saturday, Sunday and out of hours

**Source:** Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients is a comprehensive initiative led by CDC and the CDC Foundation to reduce infections in cancer patients. For more information on this topic and to learn more about this program, please visit [www.PreventCancerInfections.org](http://www.PreventCancerInfections.org).

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# 3 steps to prevent infection during your chemotherapy cancer treatment



# 1

## Prepare Watch out for a temperature

### When?

Take your temperature:

- at the same time each day,
- at any time you feel hot, flushed, chilled or unwell,
- as instructed by the staff in the hospital.

If your temperature is above 37.5°C or below 36°C, call the number given to you by your hospital even if it is the middle of the night.

### Tips

- If you have a temperature you may have an infection. If so, you need to attend the hospital as soon as possible.
- Find out from your hospital doctor or nurse when your white cell count is likely to be lowest. This is when you are at most risk of getting an infection.
- Keep a working thermometer with you at all times and know how to use it.
- Keep hospital contact numbers close to hand and know the number to call. Note that a different number may apply out of hours.
- If you need to go to an emergency department, tell staff that you are having cancer treatment and the date of your last treatment.

### Why?

If you develop a temperature at any time during your treatment it is considered a medical emergency. An infection during cancer treatment can be life-threatening.

**A temperature may be the only sign that you have an infection.**

# 2

## Prevent Clean and protect your hands

### When?

Keeping hands clean is important to prevent infection. This includes you, those who live with you, your doctors, nurses and anyone that you come in contact with. If soap and water are not available, you can use an alcohol-based hand gel.

**Don't be afraid to ask people to clean their hands.**

### Clean your hands

- Before, during, and after cooking food
- Before you eat
- After going to the toilet
- After changing a baby's nappy or helping a child to go to the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- After touching or cleaning up after your pet
- After touching household rubbish
- Before and after treating a cut or wound. If the cut or wound is deep or large or appears infected, you will need to go to the hospital.

## Protect your hands

- Wear gloves when gardening and cooking

### Why?

Washing your hands is extremely important during cancer treatment because your body is less able to fight infection.

**Unwashed hands spread infection.**

# 3

## Protect Know the signs and symptoms of infection

### When?

During your cancer treatment, your body will not be able to fight infections like it used to. Call your hospital team if you notice any of the following symptoms and signs of an infection:

- A temperature above 37.5°C or below 36°C. This is sometimes the only sign of an infection
- If you suddenly feel confused
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Rapid heart rate
- Stiff neck
- Stuffy nose
- Sore throat or new mouth sores
- Redness, soreness, or swelling in any area, including surgical wounds or around any lines that are used for your drug treatment
- Changes in your skin
- Changes in the way that you cough or a new cough