

The 'Flu Shot' -- Information for Cancer Patients, Survivors and Family Members

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Patients currently on treatment for cancer should have the flu shot with an inactive (not live) vaccine. This includes patients receiving:

- Systemic therapy such as:
 - › Chemotherapy
 - › Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors (CPIs)
 - › Targeted therapy
- Radiation therapy

Patients on treatment for cancer should not have live vaccines, like the nasal spray flu vaccine. Patients over the age of 65 should have the high dose vaccine.

You should not have the flu shot if you are allergic to the vaccine or any of the vaccine's components, or if you are advised by your Doctor to avoid or delay it.

People who are allergic to eggs can have the flu shot.

All vaccinations should only be considered after careful assessment of the risks and benefits, ask your Family Doctor/Nurse Practitioner if you should have the flu shot.

Will the flu shot protect me from getting the flu?

Yes. The flu shot will lower your chance of getting the flu. Even though it may not work as well in people with cancer, it will lower your chance of having serious flu complications which may need to be treated in a hospital.

The flu vaccine does not protect against infection with bacteria or other viruses such as COVID-19.

What about my family, friends and caregivers?

People who have regular contact with cancer patients, especially those on systemic therapy or radiation therapy, should have the flu shot. Because the flu shot may not work as well in cancer patients, it is important that the people in contact with cancer patients get the flu shot to help protect cancer patients from the flu.

When is the Flu Season?

Seasonal flu activity can begin in October and continue as late as May. Peak flu season is in a 10 to 16 week period that usually starts in December. About 10%- 20% of Canadians will get the flu each year.

When should I have the flu shot?

If you are a Hematology (blood cancer) patient, or you have been treated in the past for cancer, you should have your flu shot as soon as you can.

If you have had a Bone Marrow or Stem Cell Transplant more than 4 months ago, you should have your flu shot as soon as you can. If you had your transplant less than 4 months ago, you should talk to your doctor about when it is best to get your flu shot.

If you are having Radiation Therapy, you may have your flu shot at any time during your radiation treatment. Flu shots will not affect your radiation treatments.

If you are just starting a Systemic Therapy, you should have the flu shot before your treatment begins.

If you are already having Chemotherapy, you should have the flu shot when your white blood cell count is at its highest, usually 2-3 days before your next chemotherapy treatment.

If you have finished Chemotherapy, have the flu shot 3 to 4 weeks after chemotherapy is over.

If you are already having treatment with an Immune CPI, you should have the flu shot on a week that you are not also getting your CPI.

If you are a friend, family member or caregiver of someone with cancer you should have your flu shot as soon as you can.

Where can I get the Flu Shot?

You can get a flu shot from your Family Doctor/Nurse Practitioner or Pharmacist.

What else can I do to protect myself?

Having a flu shot is only one small part of reducing your risk of getting the flu. It is also important to clean your hands well and often, avoid touching your mouth, eyes and nose, and avoid contact with those who are sick.

Cancer patients should follow public health advice on wearing face masks.

What are the Symptoms of the Flu?

Symptoms of flu may include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Sore throat
- Extreme weakness
- Cough
- Runny eyes
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Stuffy nose
- Fatigue
- Sore Eyes

Children can also have earaches, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Elderly people may not have a fever.

What if I have Flu Symptoms or I have been exposed to someone with the flu?

If you think you have the flu and you are currently having any type of cancer treatment call your Family Doctor/Nurse Practitioner right away and ask if you should be taking Tamiflu®. Tamiflu® is an anti-viral drug that may be used to treat the flu. Anti-viral drugs are most effective if started within 48 hours of the start of symptoms.

I have some flu-like symptoms but I'm worried that it may be COVID-19.

Cancer Patients on Systemic Therapy with Yellow or Orange Alert Card

If you have a fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher and/or develop a new cough or shortness of breath go directly to the Emergency Department (ED). For any other symptoms, during the week, call your cancer team. During the weekend or after hours, contact 811 via phone or online at **811.novascotia.ca**.

Other Cancer Patients currently receiving Radiation or Systemic Therapy treatment without Yellow or Orange Alert Card

If you develop a fever of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher, a new or worsening cough, sore throat, runny nose or headache and it is during the week, call your cancer team. During the weekend or after hours, contact 811 via phone or online at **811.novascotia.ca**.

Patients with Cancer or a History of Cancer and Not Currently on Treatment

If you have a fever greater than 38°C (100.4°F) a new or worsening cough, sore throat, runny nose or headache, please contact 811 via phone or online at **811.novascotia.ca**.

If you have previously received Radiation Therapy to the chest (lung or breast) and have tested negative for COVID-19 but still have a cough and/or fever, please contact your Radiation Oncologist during the week at 902-473-6067 (Halifax) or 902-567-7771 (Sydney).

If you are having difficulty breathing or any symptoms that you are unable to manage at home, please go directly to the Emergency Department or call 911.

I'm still not sure if I should have a flu shot

If you are still not sure if you should have a flu shot, ask your Family Doctor/Nurse Practitioner at your next appointment.

Where can I get more information?

For more information about the flu shot speak to your Family Doctor/Nurse Practitioner or Pharmacist or visit the Public Health Agency of Canada's website, <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>.

You can also go to novascotia.ca/flu for more information or to book an appointment for your flu shot.

Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/cancer>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

*Prepared by: Nova Scotia Health Cancer Care Program
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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only.

It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.