

Eight-week Radiation Therapy Guarantee Policy Q&A



Nova Scotia Cancer Care Program

www.nscancercare.ca

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Being told you have cancer is difficult. Thankfully, the cancer care teams at Nova Scotia's cancer centres are highly skilled and experienced at what they do. And they're here to help.

The Province of Nova Scotia is also aware of the challenges you face. They know that starting your radiation therapy treatment as soon as possible is important. That's why they've made a promise to everyone in Nova Scotia:

If you have cancer and need radiation therapy, no more than eight weeks will pass before you start your treatment.

It's an eight-week Guarantee. And it starts the moment your Radiation Oncologist and you agree that you are ready to start your treatment.

This document will walk you through what you need to know about this promise or, as we call it, the Guarantee.

What is the Guarantee?

Simply put, if you have cancer and need radiation therapy, no more than eight weeks will pass from the time you are ready-to-treat to start-of-treatment. Our top priority is to make sure that you are treated as soon as possible.

Think of the Guarantee as a safety net. In all likelihood, you'll start your treatment much sooner than eight weeks. The Guarantee is in place to make sure that you do not wait any longer.

You'll probably have your radiation therapy treatment in one of Nova Scotia's two cancer centres:

- the QEII Cancer Care Program in Halifax, or
- the Cape Breton Cancer Centre in Sydney.

**What are your questions? Please ask.
We are here to help you.**

In the unlikely event that you cannot be treated within eight weeks at the facility where you were referred, we will offer you the option to be treated at the other cancer centre in Nova Scotia or, if need be, at a cancer centre in Atlantic Canada, or elsewhere in Canada or the United States.

The important thing to remember is that you will be given the option to receive treatment within eight weeks.

This applies to each course of radiation therapy treatment that is prescribed. Meaning, if after one course of radiation therapy treatment - involving one or more treatment sessions - a Radiation Oncologist prescribes another course of treatment, the Guarantee will apply to this additional round.

What do ready-to-treat and start-of-treatment mean?

Ready-to-treat is when the Radiation Oncologist and you agree that you are ready to start your treatment.

The Radiation Oncologist will decide if you are medically ready, given your health and the treatment you need. You might need other types of treatment besides radiation therapy, such as chemotherapy.

You will decide if you are personally ready. For example, you may choose to delay the start of your treatment in order to attend an important family event. In a case like this, you are deciding that you are not personally ready.

Start-of-treatment is exactly that. It's when you start your treatment - your first high energy radiation treatment session, using a linear accelerator.

Keep in mind you will have appointments leading up to your first treatment session – such as a planning or simulation session – that should not be confused with start-of-treatment.

During a simulation session, a machine takes images or scans of the area to be treated. The radiation therapy team uses these images to plan your actual treatment.

Who will set up this Guarantee for me?

Once you and your Radiation Oncologist agree that you are ready-to-treat, your Oncologist will speak with you about the treatment you need, including the Guarantee timeframe.

In all likelihood, you will start your treatment at the facility where you were referred before your Guarantee date. In the unlikely event that this can't happen, your Radiation Oncologist will discuss your situation with you.

What do I need to do?

Understand what the Guarantee is and how it may affect you, and mark your Guarantee date on your calendar. That's all.

It's the cancer care team's responsibility to stay on top of your treatment plan. This includes making sure you start your treatment before your Guarantee date.

How do I know if I qualify for the Guarantee?

You qualify for the Guarantee if:

- A Radiation Oncologist has prescribed external beam radiation therapy to treat your cancer (this is used to treat most types of cancer.)
- The treatment you need is offered in Nova Scotia.
- You are a resident of Nova Scotia (please refer to the Hospital Information Services Act.)
- You follow the treatment plan recommended to you by your Radiation Oncologist.

You DO NOT qualify for the Guarantee if:

- Your treatment is not offered in Nova Scotia (arrangements will be made for you to receive treatment outside of Nova Scotia but we have no control over timeframes.)
- You are not a resident of Nova Scotia.
- You choose not to have the radiation therapy treatment your Radiation Oncologist has recommended.
- You choose to have radiation therapy treatment at an out-of-province or out-of-country cancer centre instead of having the treatment offered to you under the Guarantee.
- You are offered treatment at a cancer centre within eight weeks, yet you choose to wait past the eight-week timeframe so you can go to the centre of your choice.
- You do not follow the treatment plan recommended to you by your Radiation Oncologist.
- You choose to participate in a clinical trial that has specific timeframe and location needs.
- Your tumour is benign or not cancerous.

Remember, the fact that you do not qualify for the Guarantee does not change the fact that you will continue to receive quality care. It simply means that the Guarantee does not apply to your treatment plan. So, you may start your treatment more than eight weeks after you are ready-to-treat.

Could anything else affect my eight-week Guarantee?

Yes. Things that we cannot predict may happen after your ready-to-treat date has been set. They are:

- Your Oncologist decides to change your course of treatment. This may be due to a major change in your health or the way you respond to other forms of treatment, such as chemotherapy.
- Something happens in your life that prompts you to choose to delay your treatment.

For example, you need time to make more personal arrangements before you are able to start your treatment.

- A medical issue surfaces that would affect your treatment, such as heart problems or a pregnancy.
- ‘Acts of Nature’ such as hurricanes, ice storms and major fires which impact hospital services.
- Other situations that we cannot control, such as a pandemic or shortage of specialized medical supplies (Isotopes) which impact hospital services.

If something like this occurs, your Guarantee date will be re-set accordingly.

How does this Guarantee work? What happens if treatment isn’t available for me within eight weeks?

There are two cancer centres in Nova Scotia where radiation therapy is offered:

- the QEII Cancer Care Program in Halifax, and
- the Cape Breton Cancer Centre in Sydney.

In the unlikely event that you cannot be treated in the facility where you were referred within eight weeks, here's how the Guarantee works to make sure you are treated within eight weeks:

- You will be offered treatment in the other facility in Nova Scotia. If this can't happen,
- You will be offered treatment in a facility within Atlantic Canada. If this can't happen,
- You will be offered treatment in a facility within Canada or the United States.

Who will arrange this for me?

We will make all of the arrangements for your care to be transferred to another cancer facility.

We will put together an information package that includes everything you'll need to know and do to prepare for your treatment in another facility. This package will include:

- The name of your new Radiation Oncologist and cancer centre, and directions on how to get there
- Accommodations, and directions on how to get there
- Travel arrangements, if needed
- A schedule of appointments and treatment sessions
- A check list of things to do and consider as you prepare to go
- A person to call anytime with questions

What options do I have?

Your Radiation Oncologist will discuss your situation with you, including how important it is for you to seek treatment within eight weeks. It is our responsibility to offer you treatment within eight weeks. It is your responsibility to decide what is right for you.

You can opt out of the Guarantee, and be treated in the facility of your choice. If you opt out of the Guarantee, it does not change the fact that you will continue to receive quality care. It simply means that the Guarantee will not apply to your treatment plan. So, you may start your treatment more than eight weeks after you are ready-to-treat.

For more information, please call:

The QEII Cancer Care Program in Halifax, NS (902) 473-6000

The Cape Breton Cancer Centre in Sydney, NS (902) 567-8100

Looking for more health information?

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

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

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

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Nova Scotia Health Authority

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider. The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.

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