

Infection Prevention

Your immune system can be affected by your cancer treatment. Talk to your oncology team about how your specific therapy may impact your immunity.

Some cancer treatments can leave you more vulnerable to infection. Depending on your treatment type, your body may experience a decrease in its bacteria-fighting cells (called neutrophils) or its virus-fighting cells (called lymphocytes). Your oncology team may recommend preventative medications, such as antiviral, antifungal or antibacterial drugs—especially if you are battling lymphoma or leukemia.

HOW CAN I PREVENT INFECTION?

- Wash your hands by scrubbing for 20 seconds, including the backs of your hands and in between your fingers. It is recommended to always wash your hands in the following scenarios:
 - Before, during and after cooking food
 - Before eating
 - After going to bathroom
 - After changing diapers or helping a child go to bathroom
 - After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
 - After touching or cleaning up after your pet
 - After handling any trash
 - Before or after treating a cut or wound or caring for your PORT, catheter or other access device
- Try to avoid crowded places and contact with people who are sick.
- Do not share food, cups, water bottles, utensils or other personal items, such as toothbrushes.
- Shower or bathe daily and use unscented lotion to prevent skin from becoming cracked or dry.
- Cook meats and eggs all the way through to kill any germs.
- Carefully wash raw fruits and vegetables (rinse for 15 minutes and peel).
- Protect your skin from direct contact with pet urine or feces by wearing vinyl or household cleaning gloves when cleaning up after your pet. Then, wash your hands thoroughly.
- Use gloves for gardening, as fresh fertilizer contains bacteria.

- Clean your teeth and gums with a soft toothbrush.
- Try to keep all of your household surfaces clean.
- Get the seasonal flu shot as soon as it becomes available.
- Check with your medical team about vaccine schedules.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL MY DOCTOR IF I THINK I HAVE AN INFECTION?

Uncontrolled infection can lead to serious complications, including sepsis or even death. Contact your doctor right away if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- Fever (a 100.4° fever that lasts for at least an hour or a brief, one-time fever of 101° or higher)
- Chills and sweats
- Change in cough or new cough
- Sore throat or new mouth sores
- Shortness of breath
- Nasal congestion
- Stiff neck or inability to bend neck
- Burning, discomfort or pain with urination
- Unusual vaginal discharge or irritation
- Redness, soreness or swelling in any area, including surgical wounds or PORTs
- Pain in the abdomen or rectum
- New onset of pain

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- American Cancer Society: Preventing Infections in People with Cancer
<https://amp.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/infections/preventing-infections-in-people-with-cancer.html>

