



Frequently Asked Questions about Seasonal Influenza (“Flu”) Shots **INFORMATION about “FLU” Shots for **CANCER PATIENTS****

Radiation Patients:

You may have your flu shot or take Tamiflu® at any time during your course of radiation treatment. Flu shots will not affect your radiation treatments.

Chemotherapy Patients:

It’s the time of year when people start thinking about the flu and flu shots. It’s important to know that even if you received the flu shot last year, you should still get immunized this year. Here are some answers to questions that people often ask us.

1. Should I get the flu shot?

YES. (Unless you know that you have an allergy to the vaccine.) The flu shots (vaccine) will be available from Family Doctor offices and Public Health Clinics.

2. Will the flu shot protect me from getting the flu?

The flu shot will lower the chance of you getting flu. However, it may not work as well in people with cancer, AND will not protect against other viruses. A flu shot will also NOT protect you from bacterial infections.

3. What about people around me?

People who have regular contact with patients with cancer, especially those on chemotherapy, should get the flu shot. Even if the vaccine doesn’t work in the cancer patient, if it works in people around them, the patient will have better protection.

4. When should I get the flu shot?

- If you are going to start chemotherapy, and you can get the flu shot before chemotherapy begins, then do it.
- If you are already on chemotherapy, then get the flu shot in the day or two before your next chemotherapy treatment.
- If you have finished chemotherapy, get the flu shot at least 3 to 4 weeks after chemotherapy is completed.
- If you have been treated for cancer before, get the flu shot as soon as it is available.



5. What else can I do to protect myself?

Having flu shots are a small part of reducing your risk of getting Seasonal flu. Cleaning your hands often is also very important. Face masks are not recommended for everybody at this time.

6. What about Tamiflu® (the antiviral drug)?

Tamiflu® is a type of drug that may be used to treat the flu. Patients with active cancer or on chemotherapy who develop “influenza-like illness” (see below), should contact their Oncologist immediately to ask if they should be taking Tamiflu®. These drugs are most effective if started within 48 hours of the start of symptoms.

Symptoms of flu may include:

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

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

* REMEMBER if you develop a FEVER, while you are receiving CHEMOTHERAPY, you MUST go to your nearest Emergency Department IMMEDIATELY for an assessment, as this may be due to a bacterial infection (which the flu shot and Tamiflu® do not protect against).

If you have been treated for cancer before, and develop an “influenza-like illness” while being followed by your Family Doctor, you should ask your Family Doctor if you should be taking Tamiflu®.

7. If people in my household get ill, should I take Tamiflu® so I don’t get the flu?

Tamiflu® may also be given to prevent flu infections in people with active cancer, or on chemotherapy, who have been exposed to the flu. If this occurs, you should contact your Oncologist promptly for advice.

If you are still not sure whether you should have a flu shot, please ask your Oncologist at your next scheduled clinic appointment. It is your choice whether to have a flu shot.

For more information about influenza (flu) and vaccinations, please go to:

Sudbury and District Health Unit:

http://www.sdhu.com/content/health_hazards/folder.asp?folder=12924&parent=276&lang=0

Public Health Agency of Canada:

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/13vol39/acs-dcc-4/index-eng.php>