

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or

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If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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Seasonal Flu Vaccination for patients on Chemotherapy

A patient's guide



Cancer or its treatment can lower your resistance to infection. This puts you at a higher risk of catching flu (influenza). As you are at an increased risk, you are entitled to have the flu vaccine for free.

What is the Flu

Flu is an infection which is caused by a virus. It occurs every year during the winter season between September and March.

You can catch it from other people who cough and sneeze and have the virus themselves.

Usually, the flu is harmless and people recover within a few days. For you, the symptoms of flu can be worse, it could take longer to recover or cause complications which may need hospital treatment.

The Flu Vaccination

The flu vaccine provides the best protection available against the flu. Having the flu vaccine means you are less likely to catch the flu. If you do get the flu, you are more likely to recover quicker.

For adults, the vaccine is an injection into the muscle. As the virus changes every year, you need to have a flu vaccine every year to protect yourself.

You can have the vaccine at your local GP or pharmacy.

Chemotherapy

If you are having chemotherapy, we recommend you have the flu jab just after your cycle finishes or just before your next treatment cycle starts.

This is the time when your immune system is likely to be at its peak during treatment.

Immunotherapy

Usually having the flu jab while you are on immunotherapy is safe. However, for some specific types of immunotherapy, there is an increased chance of experiencing side-effects. Your consultant will advise whether this applies to you.

Your consultant may suggest having an anti-histamine medicine just before having the vaccine to reduce the risk of any immune related side-effects, for example skin rashes.

Safety

The flu vaccine does not contain the live flu virus so you will not develop flu from having the jab. This is why it is safe to have during your treatment for cancer.

Check with your doctor if you have had a reaction to a vaccine before or you are allergic to eggs (chicken eggs are used to develop the virus and trace levels may remain in the vaccine).