

CANCER EXPLAINED PRESENTS

A FREE HEALTH HANDOUT

PREVENTING INFECTION DURING CHEMOTHERAPY

Everyday steps, and the fever rule that cannot wait

FREE TO PRINT · PLAIN LANGUAGE · SOURCES ON THE BACK

A CANCER EXPLAINED HANDOUT · BASED ON **CDC · NCI** · UPDATED **2026-11-10**
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Preventing Infection During Chemotherapy

Everyday steps, and the fever rule that cannot wait

cancer explained.org

A FEVER IS AN EMERGENCY DURING CHEMOTHERAPY

- ! **Take your temperature any time you feel warm, flushed, chilled, or unwell.**
- ! **100.4°F (38°C) or higher: call your doctor right away, day or night.**
- ! **If you go to the emergency department, tell the person checking you in that you are having chemotherapy and have a fever.**

1 Every day

- ☐ Wash your hands often with soap and water, and ask the people around you to do the same.
- ☐ Wash them before, during, and after cooking, and after touching or cleaning up after a pet.
- ☐ Stay extra clean. Clean your teeth well, and keep the area around any catheter clean and dry.
- ☐ Stay away from people who are sick or have a cold, and avoid crowds.
- ☐ Make sure the meat, fish, and eggs you eat are well cooked.
- ☐ Wash all raw fruits and vegetables very well. Your team may ask you to eat only ones that can be peeled.

2 Know your low point

CDC says white blood cells are usually lowest 7 to 12 days after each chemotherapy dose.

Ask your team when your low point will be:

_____

3 Call right away for signs of infection

- ☐ Fever. It is sometimes the only sign.
- ☐ Chills or sweats.
- ☐ A new cough, sore throat, or new mouth sore.
- ☐ Shortness of breath.
- ☐ Burning or pain when you urinate.
- ☐ Redness, soreness, or swelling anywhere, including around a port or wound.
- ☐ Diarrhea or vomiting.

4 Keep these handy

A working thermometer.

Doctor's daytime number: _____

After-hours number: _____

THE BOTTOM LINE

Clean hands lower the risk. A thermometer catches the problem early. At 100.4°F, call right away.

This resource is provided by:

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Sources: CDC: Preventing infections in cancer patients (cdc.gov/cancer-preventing-infections/patients/index.html) · CDC: Watch out for fever (cdc.gov/cancer-preventing-infections/patients/fever.html) · CDC: Signs and symptoms of infection (cdc.gov/cancer-preventing-infections/patients/symptoms.html) · CDC: Clean hands (cdc.gov/cancer-preventing-infections/patients/clean-hands.html) · NCI: Infection and neutropenia (cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/infection)

Learn more in plain language: cancerexplained.org/side-effects/infection-and-neutropenia · **Updated:** 2026-11-10

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