



Press Release

Embargoed Until
Tuesday, October 25, 2011, 7 a.m.

Contact: CDC Division of News and Electronic Media
(404) 639-3286

CDC launches effort to protect cancer patients from infections *Greater attention to infection prevention is needed for vulnerable population*

Each year more than one million patients receive cancer treatment in an outpatient oncology clinic. Despite advances in oncology care, infections from both community and health care settings remain a major cause of hospitalization and death among cancer patients receiving chemotherapy. To help protect this vulnerable patient population, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) is launching a new program featuring tools to help both clinicians and patients prevent infections.

“Cancer patients receiving chemotherapy often have weak immune systems and need to be kept safe against germs,” said [CDC Director Thomas Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.](#) “These new resources help patients take an active role in protecting themselves against infection and give doctors, nurses, and other clinicians necessary tools to better prevent infection.”

CDC’s Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients program is a comprehensive initiative focusing on providing information, action steps, and tools for patients, their families, and their health care providers to reduce the risk of life-threatening infections during chemotherapy treatment. These resources include an interactive website (www.preventcancerinfections.org) for cancer patients and caregivers, as well as a [Basic Infection Control and Prevention Plan for use by outpatient oncology settings](#).

The new website, called “[3 Steps Toward Preventing Infections During Cancer Treatment](#),” includes a questionnaire that helps cancer patients understand their risk for developing a condition called neutropenia, a low white blood cell count during chemotherapy. Neutropenia is a common and potentially dangerous side effect of chemotherapy that reduces a patient’s ability to fight infection. Cancer patients and caregivers can answer a few questions about their risk factors and receive information about how they can prepare, prevent and protect themselves from getting an infection during their cancer treatment:

1. Prepare: Watch out for a fever during chemotherapy.
2. Prevent: Clean your hands.
3. Protect: Know the signs and symptoms of an infection and what to do if you develop any signs or symptoms.

For health care providers and facility administrators, [The Basic Infection Control and Prevention Plan for Outpatient Oncology Settings](#) includes key policies and procedures to ensure the facility meets or exceeds minimal expectations for patient safety, as described in the newly released [CDC Guide to Infection Prevention in Outpatient Settings](#). The elements in this plan are based on [CDC’s evidence-based guidelines and those from professional societies](#).

“Outpatient oncology facilities’ attention to infection prevention varies greatly,” said Alice Guh, M.D., medical officer and co-lead of the initiative at CDC. “Repeated outbreaks resulting from lapses in basic infection prevention practices,



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™



such as syringe reuse, have put patients at risk. In some of these cases, the implicated clinic did not have written infection control policies and procedures or regular access to infection prevention expertise.”

It is critical that care of this vulnerable patient population be provided under conditions that minimize the risk of health care-associated infections. This responsibility should be shared by clinicians, to follow best practices and facility administrators, to ensure that staff has appropriate resources and training. A combined approach will help to emphasize the importance of creating a culture of infection prevention at all health care facilities.

The CDC recommends that outpatient oncology facilities utilize the plan in one of the following ways:

- Facilities that have a plan in place should ensure that its policies and procedures include the elements outlined in this tool.
- Facilities without a plan should use this resource as a tool to draft and implement a plan for their facility.
- Facilities can use this plan as written or modify it with facility-specific information.

Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients was developed by oncology and infection prevention experts from CDC in partnership with external experts and the CDC Foundation.

To access the 3 Steps Toward Preventing Infections During Cancer Treatment website, please visit www.preventcancerinfections.org. To access the plan, checklist, clinician and patient education materials and additional information, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections>.

###

[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](http://www.hhs.gov)



**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION**

SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™