



Seasonal flu vaccination

This information is for cancer patients who are about to start chemotherapy, or are currently having chemotherapy, or have received chemotherapy during the last twelve months at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre (MVCC).

Should I have the vaccination?

We recommend that cancer patients who are having chemotherapy, or who have had chemotherapy during the past year, should receive the seasonal flu vaccine.

If you are having immunotherapy treatment or have a haematological cancer such as leukaemia, myeloma or lymphoma, you will need to discuss with your oncology team whether this vaccination is suitable for you.

The vaccination is to provide protection because you could be at a higher risk of developing serious complications if you get flu while receiving chemotherapy treatment.

The people who live with you should also be vaccinated, because they could pass the virus on to you if they get flu.

A live nasal spray version of the flu vaccine should **not** be used to treat you or other members of your home while you are on chemotherapy.

Is it safe?

The injectable flu vaccines are not 'live' and cannot cause seasonal flu. Please tell your GP if you have any allergies, especially if you have been allergic to any vaccines you have received in the past, or if you have been allergic to eggs or to chicken protein. Although most vaccines are prepared in hens' eggs, some are not. Your GP will discuss with you which is the best vaccine in your case.

Where can I get the vaccine?

Your GP surgery will provide your seasonal flu vaccine.

Mount Vernon Cancer Centre does not carry stocks of the vaccine. Please call your GP surgery to arrange for your vaccination.

When should I have the vaccine?

If you have not yet started your chemotherapy, it is best to get your seasonal flu vaccination more than seven days before you start your treatment if possible*.

If you have started your treatment, it is still possible to get the seasonal flu vaccination, but you will need to discuss with your hospital doctor or nurse when is the best time to receive it.

They will tell you when your immunity should be at its strongest (usually three to five days before your next treatment) so that you can get the seasonal flu vaccination at a time when it will have the best effect. You will need to discuss with your oncology team if you will need a second vaccination once your treatment is finished.

If it has been more than six weeks since the end of your treatment, you can receive the seasonal flu vaccine at any time.

If it has been **less than** six weeks since you finished your treatment, please discuss the best time to receive the seasonal flu vaccine with your hospital doctor or nurse.

It is important to remember that this information only applies to the seasonal flu vaccine. If you are receiving chemotherapy you must discuss with your doctor whether you can have any other vaccines, as you must not have any live vaccines.

* The Department of Health recommends the ideal time to be vaccinated is two weeks or more before the start of your treatment.

Reference: Department of Health Immunisation Against Infectious Disease 2015-updated; chapter 19. pp.15.
For more information about flu vaccines:
NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk



This publication has been produced by the Information team at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre. Contributors include professionals, patients and carers from Mount Vernon Cancer Centre who have expertise and experience in the topics covered by this publication. All our publications are reviewed and updated regularly. If you would like any details of the references used to write this information please contact the LJMC on 020 3826 2555.