

BC Cancer Influenza Vaccine Recommendations for Adults with Cancer

People living with cancer are at a higher risk of having influenza (the flu). BC Cancer recommends that all adults with cancer get a flu vaccine every year. The flu vaccine is free. You can get it at a pharmacy, public health unit, or from your family doctor or nurse practitioner.

You can get the flu vaccine at the same time as, or any time before or after, the COVID-19 vaccine. Family members, care providers, and those in close contact with adults with cancer should also get the flu vaccine.

Inactivated influenza vaccine types for adults

Adults with cancer should get inactivated influenza vaccines. Inactivated vaccines are also called killed or non-live vaccines. **Live vaccines are not recommended for adults actively receiving cancer treatments.** Family, care providers, and those in close contacts with adults with cancer who get a live vaccine (nasal spray FLUMIST®) should avoid close contact with patients with severely low immune systems for at least 2 weeks.

For patients who will be receiving stem cell transplant or CART therapy, please talk to your cancer doctor for specific instructions.

Influenza vaccine – Timing in adults with cancer

The flu vaccine is most effective when your blood counts are near normal range. If possible, you should get your vaccine at least 2 weeks before starting your first dose of chemotherapy. If you are already receiving chemotherapy, get your vaccine 2 to 3 days before starting your next chemotherapy cycle. We recommend this so we can tell the difference between vaccine-related symptoms and chemotherapy side effects. If you are receiving Rituximab or any other immunotherapy, you can get your vaccine at any time.

Treatment	Timing
Before starting chemotherapy	At least 2 weeks before starting first round of chemotherapy to maximize effectiveness, if possible
On chemotherapy (that includes treatment with rituximab)	2 to 3 days before the next chemotherapy cycle, if possible
On maintenance rituximab without chemotherapy (example, you get treatment every 3 months)	At any time during treatment
On immunotherapy	At any time during treatment
On radiation therapy	At any time during treatment while blood counts are near normal range (Get the vaccine in the arm that is on the opposite side of your body that receives radiation treatment)