

Extra Help for Your Immune System

Cancer can deliver a one-two punch against your immune system. First, certain types of cancer, like leukemia and other blood-related cancers, suppress the immune system more than solid tumors do, leaving one open to additional diseases. Second, certain cancer treatments suppress the

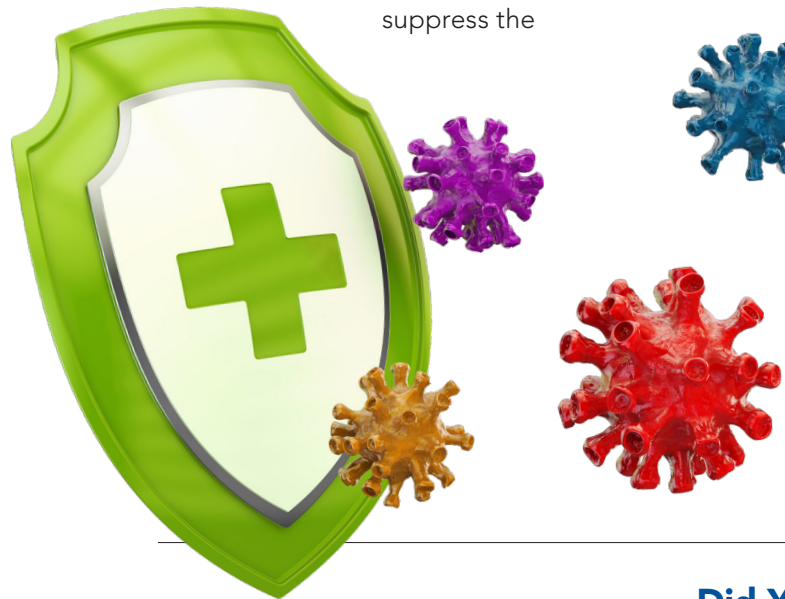
immune system. Chemotherapy is often accompanied by shots to boost the immunity that chemo has knocked down. Bone marrow transplants and prolonged steroid use also lower immunity.

Being immunocompromised means taking extra precautions.

These can include frequent hand washing and carrying hand sanitizer at all times, wearing a respirator mask, avoiding crowds, and avoiding certain activities like manicures or dental procedures. It can even mean spending less time with your pets.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends certain vaccines for cancer patients. Vaccines offer protection against disease, but some vaccines are not recommended for people with suppressed immunity. Vaccines containing a live virus pose too much of a risk, so the CDC instead recommends inactivated vaccines for cancer patients.

For example, the nasal spray flu mist contains the live flu virus and should not be given to cancer patients. Instead, the CDC recommends getting a flu shot, which contains the inactive virus. A patient should ideally be vaccinated against flu at least two weeks before starting treatment. Alternatively, a flu shot might be given between chemo cycles if the oncologist approves. Talk to your doctor about which vaccines are right for you.



Did You Know?

The Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis [whooping cough]) vaccine is recommended for cancer survivors. The pneumonia vaccine (given in two shots, PCV13 and PPSV23) is recommended for anyone with a weakened immune system. However, the pneumonia vaccine should be given before cancer treatment starts or three months after treatment ends.

A New, Safer Shingles Vaccine

Anyone who has had chickenpox can develop shingles because both come from the varicella zoster virus. Until recently, the shingles vaccine posed a problem for cancer patients. Cancer patients are particularly vulnerable to shingles, but had access only to a live vaccine. In some cases, that vaccine was not recommended even for people whose immune systems had recovered after treatment. Now an inactivated shingles vaccine is available, called Shingrix.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) is still reviewing the data on Shingrix and does not yet recommend it for immunocompromised patients. But the vaccine is approved for people who have not yet received treatment that will suppress their immune systems, and for those whose immunity has recovered. Shingrix is given in two doses and some supplies are limited, so check with your doctor.

SOURCE: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/shingles/hcp/shingrix/faqs.html



Perspective

"Not only should those with weakened immune systems get flu shots, their families and caregivers should too."

-- Mary Engel, Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center

by the numbers

67%

Estimated reduction in flu risk in vaccinated people during the 2018-2019 flu season.

10 YEARS

Recommended time between doses of the Tdap vaccine for adults.

68.9%

Percent of adults aged 65 and over who had ever received a pneumococcal (pneumonia) vaccination.

33,700

Cancer cases per year caused by HPV

The Risks from HPV

Human papilloma virus (HPV) is a major risk factor for multiple cancers. Two HPV types in particular, HPV16 and HPV18, are responsible for most HPV-related cancers. Those include cancers of the anus, cervix, oropharynx (the part of the throat at the back of the mouth, including the soft palate, the base of the tongue, and the tonsils), penis, rectum, vagina, and vulva. A vaccine is available to guard against HPV infection. Your doctor can provide more information.

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