

# Going Home: Preventing Infections While Your Blood Counts are Low



Allina Health



## Going Home

Your doctor has determined that it is safe for you to go home. But, because of the effects of your treatment, you are more likely to get infections. The guidelines in this booklet will help you prevent infections when you are at home.

When your blood counts are recovered and are not expected to go down again, you may stop these guidelines. Ask your doctor before you stop following these guidelines.

Always follow good hand hygiene. This is the best way to avoid infection, even when you are healthy.

Remember, even if you follow these guidelines, you may still get infections.

## When to Call Your Doctor

**If you have any of the following problems, please call your doctor right away:**

- a temperature higher than 101 F
- shaking chills
- burning while urinating or having to urinate often
- loose bowel movements for 2 days
- cough, sore throat or shortness of breath
- redness, swelling or drainage in any area
- nausea (upset stomach) or vomiting (throwing up) that lasts more than 12 hours
- any change that concerns you.

# Guidelines to Help Prevent Infections

## Handwashing

- Washing your hands is the single most important way to protect against infections.
- Please wash your hands often, including after using the toilet and before eating.

## Visitors

- Limit visitors to immediate family members and close friends.
- Remind all visitors to wash their hands.
- Ask that friends and family members do not visit if they:
  - are recovering from a respiratory or gastrointestinal disease, or a skin infection
  - had symptoms of the stomach flu (upset stomach, vomiting, diarrhea) in the last 72 hours.
- Children should not visit unless they are healthy. They should not have been exposed to a disease that can be spread (like a cold or influenza) within the last 3 weeks.
- Avoid large crowds. If you must be out in public areas, wear a mask.

## Pets

- If possible, avoid direct contact with pets.
- If you own a pet, take it to a vet for a checkup, feed it only commercial pet food, and do not let it wander out of your yard where it may be exposed to or eat infected food or material.

- Wash your hands after petting animals.
- Do not handle reptiles such as turtles or snakes.
- Do not clean up animal droppings or feces, and do not clean a litter box, bird cages or fish tanks.
- Keep litter boxes away from kitchens, dining rooms or where food is prepared or served.

## **Food**

- Follow food safety guidelines when preparing foods. Clean food preparation areas, wash your hands, cook food thoroughly.
- Do not eat raw meat or raw seafood.
- Do not eat from salad bars or bulk containers at grocery stores.
- Wash raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.
- Throw out old food and check for outdated foods, such as yogurt.

## **Housecleaning**

- Do not do housework that raises dust.
- If possible, wear a mask or leave the room while it is being cleaned, dusted or vacuumed.
- If you are in a room while it is being dusted, have the person cleaning use a damp dust cloth to contain the dust.
- If a humidifier is needed, use a steam vaporizer and clean often. Do not use a cold humidifier.

## **Personal hygiene**

- Bathe every day and wash your hands often.
- Use different towels from others in your house.
- Wash your perineal area after a bowel movement.  
Women should wash the area from front to back.
- If your skin is dry, use lotion to prevent more damage.
- Avoid rectal suppositories, enemas, douches or tampons.
- Shave with an electric shaver only.

## **Mouth care**

- Use a soft toothbrush and soak it in hot water before using it. This will help to soften the bristles. If you have mouth sores, tell your doctor and ask about medicines and a sponge toothbrush. Avoid using floss.
- You may be told to do mouth rinses with a solution of salt and baking soda.
- Postpone surgery or dental work.

## **Sexual activity**

- You may lose desire or interest. This is normal.
- You should talk to your partner about your feelings and need to be intimate in other ways.
- You may hold, kiss or hug your partner unless he or she is ill or recently sick.
- You may resume intercourse once your platelet count is more than 50,000 and white cell count is more than 2,000.
- You may need to use a vaginal lubricant such as K-Y Jelly®.

- Avoid anal and oral intercourse, which may increase infections.
- Use condoms to decrease the risk of infection.
- Birth control is recommended because there is the chance you can get pregnant or father a child while on the treatments.

## **Travel**

- You will need your doctor's approval before traveling.
- You may need to take extra precautions around food, and drink only commercially bottled beverages.

## **Miscellaneous**

- Talk with your doctor before you get a vaccination when your blood counts are low.
- Avoid working in the garden or check with your doctor to see if you may work in the garden while wearing gloves and a mask.
- Avoid being in construction sites. If you are unable to avoid a construction site, wear a mask.
- Do not smoke and avoid exposure to tobacco smoke.
- Do not bathe or swim in recreational waters such as pools, lakes or hot tubs.



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