



Pregnant Women Exposure to People Undergoing Cancer Therapy

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Dear OncoLink "Ask The Experts,"

I am 16 weeks pregnant and taking care of my mother who is being treated for pancreatic cancer. She will begin chemotherapy in a few weeks. Are there any risks for me or the baby to be around this situation?

Carolyn Vachani RN, MSN, AOCN , OncoLink's Nurse Educator, responds:

Patients who are receiving chemotherapy or biotherapy (another class of medications used to treat cancer) pose no risk to children, pregnant women, or anyone else. Cancer treatment medications are most often excreted from the body in urine, stool, and vomit for 48-72 hours after each treatment. It is best to prevent exposure to these body fluids for that period of time for everyone in the household - particularly you while pregnant and your child once born. The patient could use a different bathroom on those days in order to be extra cautious. If there is one bathroom, experts recommend flushing the toilet twice after each use. I'd add that wiping down the seat is also a good idea. Ideally you should not be the person cleaning up any body fluids in the case of an accident. If it is necessary for you to do so, wear gloves to avoid exposure to anything in the fluids.

As for radiation therapy (often used for pancreatic cancer as well), the patient is not "radioactive", and poses absolutely no danger to anyone. The one exception to this are patients who receive brachytherapy, in which radiation "seeds" are implanted directly into the tumor. The seeds remain permanently in the body, while the radioactivity that they contain is slowly given off over time. In these cases, the patient is given very specific instructions for radiation safety at home. This type of treatment is most often used for prostate and thyroid cancers. This treatment is also used for some gynecologic cancers, but that treatment is typically done in the hospital.

In addition, keep in mind that during therapy, the patient's immune system may be suppressed and it is the patient who is at higher risk to catch colds and other infections. Handwashing is the best way to prevent the patient from picking up any bugs from you or any other visitors. Your mom is lucky to have you to support her through her treatment- thank you for being there!

Learn more about [safety during cancer treatment](#) and ask your care team if you have further questions.

[pregnancy, safety](#)

No

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