

Emergency Advice



This section has information about what to do if you have problems related to your condition or treatments and require immediate advice.

Complications can occur as a result of some anti cancer treatments or the cancer itself.

It is therefore vital that you report these symptoms urgently.

We therefore provide all our patients with access to a 24 hour emergency advice line.

Urgent enquiry requiring immediate advice

For example:

- Temperature over 37.5C and on course of chemotherapy treatment
- Flu like symptoms
- Feel unwell
- Diarrhoea and/or sickness over 24 hours
- Chest pain
- Severe rash
- Bleeding
- Painful red veins after administration of chemotherapy
- Unexplained bruising

Acute Oncology Service Team

01603 646799 (24 hour service)

Acute Haematology Service Team

01603 646753 (24 hour service)

Emergency Advice

If you are experiencing

Back Pain
Neck Pain
Numbness, weakness or difficulty using your arms and legs
Lack of bladder or bowel control

This could be **Metastatic Spinal Cord Compression (MSCC)**

Contact the Acute Oncology Service (AOS)

Oncology
Haematology

☎ 01603 646799
☎ 01603 646753

People with cancer are at risk of it spreading to other parts of their body, including the spine (this is known as 'spinal metastases').

Spinal metastases can be painful and if not treated can lead to MSCC – this is when the spinal metastases press on the nerves in the spine. MSCC is rare, but it can cause damage to the spinal cord and can lead to permanent paralysis.

This information sheet is to help you recognise the important symptoms of spinal metastases and MSCC. It is important to report your symptoms quickly as the earlier treatments are started the better the result usually is.

Symptoms to watch out for:

- Pain or tenderness in the middle or top of your back or neck
- Severe pain in your lower back that is getting worse or doesn't go away.
- Pain in your back that is worse when you cough, sneeze or go to the toilet.
- Back pain that stops you from sleeping.
- A narrow band of pain down the arm or leg or around the body.
- Numbness, weakness or difficulty using your arms or legs
- Bladder or bowel control problems.

Bleeding

Patients undergoing chemotherapy are at an increased risk of life threatening bleeding.

This is due to the platelets dropping following chemotherapy. The platelets make up part of your blood; they are designed to clot the blood when you cut or injure yourself. When you don't have enough platelets we say you are 'thrombocytopenic' this means you are at risk of mild to severe bleeding.

If you are experiencing:

- Small bruises following knocks
- Nose bleeds which stop after a few minutes
- Bleeding gums

Contact your key worker or Nurse Specialist advice

However, please contact the AOS if you develop:

- Profuse bleeding which will not stop
- Large unexplained bruises

Shortness of Breath

There can be many causes of breathlessness, which can be related to your cancer, treatments or other conditions such as infections.

Treatments such as chemotherapy can cause conditions which lead to breathlessness. If you have any of the following symptoms:

- Shortness of breath on exertion
- Feeling more fatigued

Contact your key worker or Nurse Specialist.

However, please contact the AOS if you have any of these symptoms:

- Extreme shortness of breath
- Sharp pain on breathing
- A dizzy/light headed feeling
- A chesty cough
- Coughing up phlegm which is green/brown and thick

Chest Pain

There can be many causes of chest pain, which can range from non-serious to life threatening.

Treatments can cause or worsen chest pains. If you have these symptoms:

- A feeling of heavy/crushing/tightening pain in the middle of your chest
- Chest pain going down your arm or up your neck

Contact the emergency ambulance service ☎ 999

If you have any these symptoms, call the AOS:

- Shortness of breath or sharp pain on breathing in
- Feeling of a racing heart/palpitations
- Pain on movement
- A dizzy/light headedness feeling
- Sweating
- Feeling sick

Severe Diarrhoea

Severe diarrhoea is a side effect of some chemotherapy drugs or radiotherapy to some parts of the body. If you have severe diarrhoea you will be at an increased risk of developing severe dehydration and / or infection.

If you are experiencing loose stools or diarrhoea up to 4 times a day, call key worker for advice.

However, please call the AOS, if you are experiencing diarrhoea that is:

- watery
- profuse
- more than 4 times daily/overnight

Extravasation (Leakage of chemotherapy into the surrounding skin)

Extravasation injury is associated with giving chemotherapy through a needle into the veins. The chemotherapy drugs can accidentally escape from the needle into the surrounding area.

Extravasation may not show immediately and can be apparent some time later.

The symptoms of this are visible around the injection site. These may include:

- discomfort or severe pain
- redness of the skin
- ulceration of the skin
- itchy skin
- blistering

Severe Infection (Neutropenic Sepsis)

Patients undergoing chemotherapy are at an increased risk of life threatening infections.

This is due to the amount of white blood cells dropping following chemotherapy.

If you have any one or more of these symptoms you may require urgent admission to hospital for antibiotics:

- Temperature of 37.5 C or above
- Temperature below 36 C
- Feel generally unwell
- Flu like symptoms
- Shivering and shaking (rigor)

Severe Sore Mouth

Mouth ulcers are associated with some chemotherapy drugs and radiotherapy to the mouth or throat. If you develop mouth ulcers contact your key worker who for advice on what to do

However, please contact the AOS if you have any of the following:

- Several mouth ulcers
- Swollen mouth, tongue or gums
- Severe pain in the mouth
- Ulcers on the lips
- Unable to eat or drink due to the ulcers

Severe Rash

Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and some of the biological tablet treatments can cause severe rashes. Rashes can also be a sign of infection or skin conditions such as dermatitis.

Contact your key worker for advice if your rash is:

- Slightly itchy
- Red
- Not wide-spread but in one area

However, please contact the AOS if you have any of these symptoms:

- Red angry rash on several parts of your body
- Very itchy
- Painful
- Spots or blisters that are weeping

Vomiting

Vomiting is associated with some chemotherapy drugs and occasionally radiotherapy treatment and can also be caused by the position of the cancer. We provide anti-sickness drugs to help manage your sickness in such circumstances. Please take them as directed to be most effective.

If you are unable to eat or drink due to feeling nauseous contact your Key Worker.

However, please contact the AOS if you are experiencing:

- Persistent vomiting
- Unable to drink
- Feel very weak
- Unable to take your Anti sickness drugs