

OMIP **OUTLOOK**

Oregon Medical Insurance Pool • 1-800-848-7280

Flu Information

What is the Flu? Free flu shots available for OMIP members



The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death.

While most healthy people recover from the flu without complications, some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious complications from the flu.

Members of the Oregon Medical Insurance Pool are eligible for a free flu shot at clinics throughout the state. These flu shot clinics, which include the major pharmacy chain stores and county health departments, are typically held between Oct. 1 and December 31. Please check with the immunization provider (typically the pharmacist) at your local pharmacy chain store or ask your county health department if they participate in the Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon Flu Shot Program. If so, present your member card and they will bill Regence directly for the cost of the flu shot.

Hand-to-Hand Combat

Remember how you were taught to always cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze? That actually helps spread the infection. Those tiny droplets get on your hands, taking the virus along with them. As a result, you leave the virus behind on everything you touch.

To help prevent this “catch-and-spread” cycle:

1. Wash your hands often
2. Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, preferably with a tissue or arm (not hands)

3. Don't put your hands around your eyes, mouth or nose until you have had a chance to wash them

Adults may be able to infect others one day before getting symptoms and up to seven days after getting sick.

Here are some things to consider as we approach flu season

- ❖ **Transportation.** Could the flu interrupt your transportation to work? What's the plan if your carpool partner needs to stay home?
- ❖ **Childcare.** Think about various scenarios — what happens if you get sick, or your child gets sick, or your caregiver gets sick?
- ❖ **Caring for family and pets.** Are there people who count on you to check on them regularly? Parents? Aging relatives or neighbors? If you become sick and can't follow up with these people, who will serve as backup? What type of care will be needed for your or their pets?
- ❖ **Food.** Keep some easy meals on hand to feed your family in case the flu makes it difficult to get to the grocery store. Find out whether delivery options exist through local grocery stores. Stock up on items that a flu patient might need.
- ❖ **Prescriptions.** Ensure you have a few extra days supply of critical prescriptions. You may want to learn the emergency options at your pharmacy, and look into home delivery options.
- ❖ **Emergency contacts.** Ensure that family members know whom to call in a given situation. Update phone directories and cell phones.

Cancer Support

by Ken DuBois, Contributor

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A cancer diagnosis is naturally a frightening, stress-inducing piece of news. But even after a patient has come to grips with the facts, there are still many more emotional bumps in the road. The prospect of surgery or chemotherapy can be a major source of anxiety, never mind the pain and fatigue that often results. And lifestyle changes can be stressful, as when cancer patients are unable to work, or their role changes within their family. Often, too, they worry about how their children will handle the illness. The possibility of recurrence, for some patients, is terrifying, and this also causes emotional distress.

The overall stress level for many patients is overwhelming — unlike anything they’ve experienced before. In fact, according to a study published in *Clinical Psychology Review*, the anxiety in cancer patients may sometimes reach the level of post-traumatic stress disorder. Recognizing this problem, and its adverse effects on a patient’s physical health, many care providers are making stress-reduction an essential part of a cancer patient’s overall treatment plan.

“The most stressful time is at the beginning, and ... when they start their actual treatment,” says Deb Walts, an Oncology Nurse Navigator at Good Samaritan, a Legacy Health Systems hospital in Portland, Ore. “A patient thinks, ‘Oh my God, I have breast cancer and now I have to have surgery,’ and that’s a real stressful time. But it’s normal that they’re anxious.” It’s not normal, she says, “when they’re just not coping — they’re falling apart.”

Detecting those emotional problems, and guiding the patient toward stress management sessions or counseling is part of Walts’s role as a Navigator, and it’s something she does intuitively, she says, without a formal screening process. To check a cancer patient’s level of

distress, she often has to draw them out, and she checks to make sure they have a support system outside the hospital as well. If they’re coming to their appointments alone, Walts says, that may be a sign that they’re lacking emotional support.

“Some people are just individuals and they don’t want someone to come and hear everything, [or] they [just] don’t have anybody else,” she says. “But it’s the ones that are holding people away, who don’t want them to be part of this experience — then I might say, ‘It might be helpful to talk to our counselor, or go see Selma.’”

Selma Annala has helped patients deal with cancer-related stress for over 20 years at Good Samaritan and other Portland-area Legacy Hospitals. A Recreational Therapist certified in stress management, she’s the hospitals’ Supervisor of Integrative Cancer Care, working with cancer patients one-on-one and facilitating a variety of support groups, as well as movement groups, exercise groups and yoga classes. She is acutely aware of the ways stress can affect the body and its functions, and she helps patients to recognize those difficulties in themselves, and to see the health benefits “of focusing on self.”

“Breathing is probably the first thing we help people do,” says Annala. “We have them identify what their stress response might be. Some people get very anxious and they breathe very shallowly, and their blood pressure rises. It’s being aware of what your body does — where you’re holding tension — and then trying to reverse that.”



Humans naturally use stress to get through difficult situations, Annala says, but stress that is constant has a negative effect on health. Depression is a common issue with cancer patients, too, and confronting that emotional state, she says, is an important part of their health plan.

“When people are experiencing depression, they may not be able to follow through with treatment,” she says, “or participate in activities that help them maintain or retain good health. And they may not be able to continue with their job. So depression can certainly get in the way.”

For some, one-on-one stress management is not the right solution, and Annala may encourage a patient to find a release in creating art, in journaling, or in movement therapy, or through one of the support groups she oversees. Because cancer patients have such a wide variety of experiences, Legacy Health Systems now offer 11 different groups, including three for breast cancer patients alone. Every group, Annala says, is intended to be a “place of commonality.”

“Support groups are a place where you feel safe and able explore what is going on with other people who have similar issue from having had a cancer diagnosis,” Annala says. “It’s the power of a group. For some people, there’s nowhere else they can say the things they say and feel supported and ... comfortable. Some group members could be people who are down the line with their diagnosis, and someone with a new diagnosis can look at them and say: ‘Look, that person made it through. I can make it through, too.’”

With their emotional issues under control, Annala says, many patients start to find a more positive response to their situation. “For some people, they have a newfound [desire] to help other people, and they want to use their cancer experience to make some changes in the way they live their life. I help them identify what is the most important to them. I help them on that journey.”

OMIP Town Halls & Producer Training

We had a successful round of Town Hall meetings and producer trainings in the spring. This year we opened the meetings up to the public as well as OMIP members. We were trying to get the word out about the OMIP program to as many people as possible since there still seems to be a lot of people that haven’t heard of our program.

The OMIP Board is looking into implementing some of the suggestions we received from OMIP enrollees. These suggestions included things like \$0 co-pay for certain generic, evidence-based prescriptions, \$0 co-pay for diabetic drugs and supplies and covering the Weight Watchers® program.

Tom Jovick, OMIP Program Manager, spoke about how OMIP sets their rates and benefits each year as well as how the program is paid for. It is a misconception by many that the premiums are what pay for the entire program when in reality they only pay for ½ of the cost. The insurance companies that sell insurance in Oregon pay for the other ½ of the program.

Mr. Jovick also discussed the rising costs of healthcare and the dilemmas that face our legislators and other officials.

We had approximately 133 attendees and only 38 of those were OMIP enrollees.



Healthy Recipe

SLOW-COOKER WILD RICE SOUP

Makes: 6 (1-1/2-cup) servings

Prep: 30 minutes

Cook: 6 hours on low or 3 hours on high; Cool: 15 minutes; Stand: 15 minutes

Ingredients:

2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped (1 cup)
 2 stalks celery, chopped (1 cup)
 ¾ cup uncooked wild rice, rinsed and drained
 1 medium onion, chopped (½ cup)
 1 small sprig fresh rosemary
 2 bay leaves
 1 teaspoon finely shredded lemon peel
 ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
 3 chicken breast halves with bone (about 2¼ pounds total)
 3 14-ounce cans reduced-sodium chicken broth
 ½ cup snipped fresh parsley
 Ground black pepper

Directions:

In a 4- to 4½-quart slow cooker, combine carrots, celery, wild rice, onion, rosemary, bay leaves, lemon peel, and the ¼ teaspoon pepper. Top with chicken breast halves. Pour chicken broth over all.

Cover; cook on low heat setting for 6 to 6½ hours or on high-heat setting for 3 hours. Remove chicken and cool slightly. Discard rosemary sprig and bay leaves.

Cut chicken from bone; discard bones. Chop chicken and return to soup along with parsley. Season to taste with additional pepper.