

Patient and Family Guide to BCG Treatment for Bladder Cancer

What is BCG treatment?

BCG treatment or “Bacillus Calmette-Guerin” treatment is the main therapy used to treat early-stage bladder cancer.

How does BCG treatment work?

BCG treatment is a liquid delivered directly into your bladder through a thin flexible tube called a catheter. When the BCG solution enters your bladder, it triggers your body’s immune system to attack the cancer cells in your bladder. You will need to hold the solution in your bladder and avoid peeing for at least 1.5 - 2 hours.

Is BCG chemotherapy?

BCG is not chemotherapy. It is immunotherapy because it uses your body’s defenses to kill off the cancer cells.

What are the benefits?

BCG treatment is the most effective treatment for early-stage bladder cancer. It slows tumor growth and decreases your chance of needing bladder surgery in the future. BCG treatment is localized to the bladder and will not damage healthy tissue. It does not enter your bloodstream so it has no effect on cells in other parts of your body.

Are there any restrictions after a BCG treatment?

There are no activity restrictions. You may want to rest the day you receive BCG, as you may feel tired. You should avoid sexual intercourse for 24-48 hours after your BCG treatment and avoid crowds and people who are sick. In general, most people return to work or school in one to two days.

How do I know if BCG treatment is working?

Six weeks after your last BCG treatment, when your bladder has healed from the BCG treatments, a cystoscopy (a procedure to look inside your bladder using a thin camera) will be done. The treatment is considered successful if the doctor does not see any areas of concern in your bladder during the cystoscopy.

How often will I receive BCG treatment?

The initial BCG cancer treatment occurs weekly for six weeks. This is called **BCG Induction Therapy**. If the treatment is working, your doctor may prescribe BCG Maintenance Therapy.

BCG Maintenance Therapy is given weekly for three weeks every 3 months. Six weeks after the last maintenance treatment, a cystoscopy is performed to evaluate for recurrent cancer. This pattern is typically repeated for four cycles (1 year) and in some cases longer.

How do I prepare for BCG treatment?

- On the day of your treatment, it is best to decrease the amount of fluid you drink and avoid drinks with caffeine (such as coffee, tea, cola) or drinks that are carbonated or bubbly - because they may cause you to urinate (pee) more and prevent you from holding your BCG treatments for the full time.

- Please call the office if you have any symptoms of a urinary tract infection (UTI) – symptoms may include a strong urge to urinate (pee) that doesn't go away, a burning feeling when urinating; frequent urination, and passing small amounts of urine
- You should also notify the nurse if you are taking antibiotics for any reason. Antibiotics may decrease the BCG treatment’s ability to kill the cancer cells.

What should I expect during my BCG treatment office visit?

- When you arrive, you will be asked to give a urine sample and empty your bladder. If testing shows any possibility of a urine infection, your urine will be sent for more testing and we will hold your BCG treatment until we have more information.
- Once in the exam room, your temperature will be taken to make sure you don’t have a fever. You will be asked to undress from the waist down and cover with a sheet.
- Your urethra area will be cleaned and an anesthetic gel will be given to numb the area and decrease any pain or discomfort.
- Your healthcare provider will then place a catheter into your urethra (the hole you pee from), drain the remaining urine and inject the liquid BCG solution into your bladder. The catheter will then be removed.
- For your first treatment, you will need to stay in the office for the 1.5-2 hours and need to urinate (pee) before you leave. On other visits, once the treatment is complete, you will be free to leave your appointment.

Is BCG treatment contagious to others?

Yes. BCG treatment contains live bacteria, which will be present in your urine on the day of treatment. This can be passed to other people if they are exposed to it. To reduce the risk of contamination, follow these instructions for the first **two times** you urinate after every BCG treatment:

- Don’t use public toilets.
- Sit down on the toilet to avoid splashing.
- After you urinate, add 2 cups of undiluted bleach to the toilet, close the lid, wait 15 to 20 minutes and then flush.
- Drink lots of fluids to dilute your urine.
- If you have urinary incontinence (loss of bladder control), wash your clothes right away in a washing machine. Don’t wash them with other clothes.
- If you wear an incontinence pad, pour bleach on the pad, allow it to soak in, then place it in a plastic bag and discard it in the trash.

What are possible side effects?

For the first 24 - 48 hours after BCG, you may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

Sign or Symptom	Management
Urinating often A burning feeling when you urinate	Increase your fluid intake. Avoid caffeine and alcohol. The burning feeling may get worse during the treatment and you may notice you have to urinate more frequently. Sometimes medications can help with these symptoms.

Blood in the urine	The BCG causes some irritation to your bladder and may cause bleeding that can turn your urine pink tinged or red. Drink fluids to keep your urine clear and prevent blood clots from forming in the bladder. Blood in the urine usually stops within 24-48 hours.
Low-grade fevers (up to 100 degrees F) Mild chills Aching, and flu-like symptoms	Tylenol will help to relieve these symptoms within 24- 48 hours. Drink as much fluid as you can to keep your urine clear. Rest. These symptoms occur because BCG stimulates your immune system. If these symptoms persist or worsen beyond a few days, please contact the office.
Feeling tired	Feelings of tiredness may increase as you receive BCG each week. Rest.

When should I call the office?

- If you have a fever over 101°, chills, rash, prolonged cough, specific joint pain, or if any of the above symptoms last longer than 48 hours.
- If you start taking antibiotics for any reason, including an upper respiratory infection or urinary tract infection.
- If you have blood in your urine before a BCG appointment.

In most cases, your BCG treatment will be re-started after the above symptoms are gone or the antibiotics are complete.

Urology office phone: 847-503-3000

BCG Treatment and Cystoscopy Schedule

TURBT Date: _____ (start treatment about 4 weeks after procedure)

BCG Induction Therapy - Every week for 6 weeks with follow up cystoscopy 6 weeks after treatment.

BCG #1	
BCG #2	
BCG #3	
BCG #4	
BCG #5	
BCG #6	

6 weeks

Cystoscopy	
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6 weeks

1st BCG Maintenance Therapy - Every week for 3 weeks. Cystoscopy 6 weeks after last treatment.

BCG #1	
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BCG #2	
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BCG #3	
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6 weeks

Cystoscopy	
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6 weeks

2nd BCG Maintenance Therapy - Every week for 3 weeks. Cystoscopy 6 weeks after the last treatment

BCG #1	
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BCG #2	
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BCG #3	
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6 weeks

Cystoscopy	
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3 months

Cystoscopy	
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3rd BCG Maintenance Therapy – To start a week after cystoscopy. Every week for three weeks.

BCG #1	
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BCG #2	
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BCG #3	
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3 months from last cystoscopy

Cystoscopy	
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3 months

Cystoscopy	
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4th BCG Maintenance Therapy – To start a week after your cystoscopy. Every week for three weeks.

BCG #1	
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BCG #2	
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BCG #3	
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Continue cystoscopies every 3 months until indicated by doctor.

Urologist:

Urology office phone: 847-503-3000

Address for treatments: 2180 Pfingsten Rd, suite 3000, Glenview IL 60026

