



MEDIASOURCE

For Immediate Release: June 2008
Produced for: James Cancer Hospital at Ohio St. Univ.
Contact: Marti Leitch
Media Relations Specialist
mleitch@mediasourcetv.com

FOR SOME PATIENTS, CANCER IS JUST HALF THE BATTLE

DURING TREATMENT, PATIENTS FACE CONSTANT THREATS FROM THEIR ENVIRONMENT

(COLUMBUS, Ohio) - This time of year, we don't think twice about mowing the yard or an occasional mosquito bite - they're typical spring and summertime things. For patients undergoing cancer treatments, they can be dangerous situations. Of the one million people who will get cancer this year,* thousands will undergo treatments that raise their own set of challenges. For them, cancer is only half the battle.

Richard Thornhill says he never washed his hands so much, or even cared about sanitation like he does, until he began his treatments for cancer. Now, because his immune system has been weakened by his medication, anything that might have a germ could be a threat.

"You come back in and you immediately sanitize your hands or wash your hands. I mean I washed my hands to the point where I've got almost all of the hair off of them, I mean it's continuous," says Thornhill.

It's not just what he touches that can be a threat, it can also be what he breathes. Pollen or fungus in the air can cause respiratory infections this time of year and insects can be much more than a nuisance.

"Any exposure to any microbes that might not be harmful to someone with a normal immune system can be very harmful to somebody who is about to receive chemotherapy," says Jeremy Young, MD at Ohio State University's James Cancer Hospital.

Young says not only can a simple infection lead to major complications in a cancer patient, it can actually delay or prolong their chemotherapy. For those who know someone who is undergoing cancer treatments, he has this advice:

"If you feel ill at all, even with a simple upper respiratory tract infection, try to avoid contact with the patient, or, if you must, wear a mask and be sure to wash your hands frequently," says Young.

Doctors say some chemotherapies can affect a patient's immune system for weeks or even months afterward.

*"Who Gets Cancer?", American Cancer Society, retrieved from www.cancer.org, May 2008