



## Radiation Therapy to the Vaginal Vault: High Dose-Rate (HDR) Brachytherapy Procedure

This handout will give you information about HDR radiation therapy to your vaginal vault (the top of your vagina). We will give you and your family member/partner-in-care support during your treatments. We will also answer any questions you have.

After each radiation treatment, it is safe for you to be around other people (including children) and pets. You are not radioactive.

During this procedure an applicator is placed into your vagina. A radioactive source will be placed inside the applicator to give treatment to your vaginal vault. The radioactive source and applicator are removed after each treatment is finished.

Your appointment will be about 40 minutes long. Your radiation oncologist will decide how many treatments you need.

### What happens on the day of your procedure?

When you arrive for your appointment, check in at a computer on the B1 level (lower level) of the cancer centre. Take a seat in the waiting room until you are called by a radiation therapist. The radiation therapist will explain the procedure to you and make sure you are ready for your procedure.

For each procedure, you will lay on your back with your legs up in stirrups (like you do for a Pap smear or vaginal exam). An applicator (see picture #1) will be put in your vagina.



Picture #1: Applicator that is put in your vagina

A lubricating gel will be placed on the applicator to make it easier for it to go into your vagina. You may feel some discomfort when the applicator is placed into your vagina. A medication may be used to numb your vagina before the applicator is put in if you are having a lot of discomfort. You may notice this more on your first day of treatment. It is important you relax as this makes it easier for the applicator to be put in. You need to stay still during this time. Let your healthcare team know if you are uncomfortable or have any concerns.

The applicator inside your vagina is connected to the brachytherapy machine (see picture #2) with a tube.



Picture #2: Brachytherapy machine

The radioactive source moves from the brachytherapy machine, through the tube to the applicator in your vagina. The radioactive source will be in place for about 5 to 15 minutes before it returns to the brachytherapy machine. The applicator will be removed from your vagina. You will not feel anything during the treatment.

### **Side effects you may have**

Radiation treatment side effects are different for each person. You might experience some minor vaginal spotting (small amount of light bleeding). If you are having HDR treatment and external beam radiation you may have an increase in some of the side effects you are already having. Please read the booklet called **Radiation Therapy to the Pelvis** for a list of side effects and what you can do to manage them.

### **What happens next?**

Side effects you have from your radiation treatment will continue for up to 4 to 6 weeks after your treatments are finished. Some of the side effects may get worse before they get better. This is normal. At your last treatment appointment, the radiation therapists will review any care you need to continue during this time. You will be given a vaginal dilator and told how to use it. It is important you read the handout on **Using a Vaginal Dilator**.

At your last treatment appointment, you will be given a follow up appointment to see your radiation oncologist. Until you come back for this appointment, you need to have enough of the medications the radiation oncologist prescribed for you.

**If you have a problem or concern about a symptom or side effect from your cancer treatment:**

1. Call your primary nurse at the cancer centre from Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4 pm, (except on holidays). Use the phone number your primary nurse gave you.
2. Contact CareChart Digital Health from Monday to Friday, 5 pm to 8:30 am and anytime on weekends and holidays for symptom management support.

Talk to a nurse using one of these options:

- Call the after-hours telephone line at 1-877-681-3057.
- Request a video call by going to [www.carechart.ca](http://www.carechart.ca).
- Use the CareChart Digital Health App. This App is available to download for iOS or Android devices.

Call 911 or go to the emergency department at the hospital closest to you for a medical emergency. Talk to any member of your healthcare team if you have questions or do not understand any of the information in this handout.

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