



# RADIATION THERAPY INFORMATION GUIDE

Endovaginal high-dose-rate  
brachytherapy

Name of my radiation oncologist: \_\_\_\_\_

Department phone no.: **418-691-5264**

Consult this document on: [www.chudequebec.ca/Curietherapie\\_endovaginale](http://www.chudequebec.ca/Curietherapie_endovaginale)

## Introduction

Your health condition requires you to have brachytherapy. This guide contains information about:

- what brachytherapy is;
- the steps involved in planning your treatments;
- what will happen during your treatments;
- the possible side effects;
- recommendations during and after the treatments.

## The centre

The radiation oncology centre at CHU de Québec-Université Laval is a supraregional centre with a mission to:

- provide quality treatments;
- promote research;
- participate in student training;
- evaluate new technologies.

You may be asked to participate in research projects during your treatments.

You may also be seen by students during your appointments. Students are always closely supervised by a health professional in their field.

## Your team

- The **radiation oncologist** (your doctor) will meet you for a consultation. After reviewing your file, speaking to you and examining you, the doctor will decide whether you are a candidate for brachytherapy. He will oversee every step of your treatment.
- The **nurse** will be involved in assessing your physical and mental condition and will manage your symptoms during your treatments.
- **Radiation therapists** will be there to support you during your brachytherapy treatments (from preparation to administration).
- **Medical physicists** will calculate your brachytherapy dose.
- Depending on your condition, you may need to see other team members before or after your brachytherapy treatments, including a **nutritionist, social worker, psychologist** or **pivot nurse**.

## What is high-dose-rate brachytherapy?

High-dose-rate brachytherapy (HDR-BT) is a procedure that involves administering a high dose of radiation to the tissues where the cancer is at risk of recurring, to preserve as much of the surrounding normal tissue as possible. The objective is to maximise the control of the disease with minimal side effects.



To do this, an applicator is placed directly in an area where doctors think there is a risk of recurrence. The applicator is then connected to the treatment device.

The device contains a radioactive source of iridium-192. The radioactive source moves to different positions inside the applicator. At the end of the treatment, the source returns to its sealed capsule. This device lets us administer a very high dose of radiation in a short period of time.

**The device does not release any radioactivity. You will not become radioactive after your treatments, and there is no danger to anyone around you.**

## Brachytherapy and other treatments

Most of the time, brachytherapy is used in combination with surgery, external radiation therapy and/or chemotherapy. The treatment choice is based on accepted practices and a joint decision between you and your doctors.

## First visit



### *Review of your medical file*

You will not have any treatment at your first radiation oncology visit. Your radiation oncologist will review your medical file and examine you, after which he will prescribe the appropriate treatment.

At this visit, it's important to tell your doctor if you have an implantable electronic or other medical device (e.g., pacemaker, insulin pump, hearing aid). To avoid breakage, manufacturers recommend removing some of these devices during pre-treatment examinations or treatments.

## Treatments

The number of brachytherapy treatments depends on your health condition and your medical file. **Most often, you will have three sessions.**

You will meet other patients during your visits, but it's important to remember that your treatments are personalized and tailored to your individual needs.

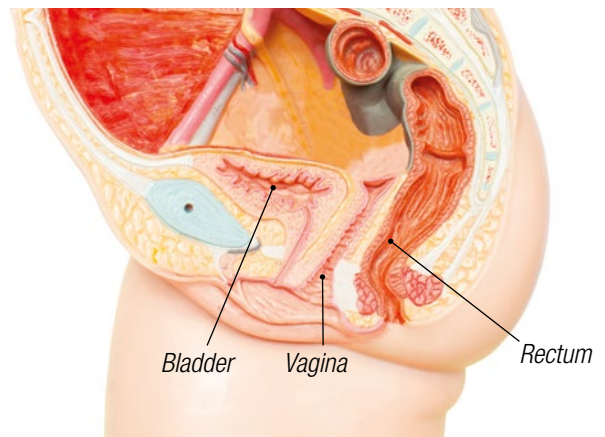
If you are receiving both external radiation therapy and brachytherapy, your radiation oncologist will decide on the best time for your brachytherapy treatments.



### During the treatment

**\* | The whole process should take about 1 hour.**

- The radiation therapists will place you in the gynecological position.
- The doctor will do a pelvic exam, then insert an applicator into your vagina. There are different sizes of applicators available. Depending on your anatomy, the doctor will choose the right one for you. **From that point on, you will have to stay lying down.**
- You will have a CT scan to check the position of the catheter and calculate the treatment dose.
- The radiation source will then be placed inside the applicator.
- The treatment will take 5 to 15 minutes.
- After the applicator is removed, you can leave the hospital.
- A sanitary pad will be supplied for your trip home.
- You will feel pressure in your vagina.





## Side effects

Brachytherapy is a treatment that can affect normal tissue and cause side effects.

The side effects of brachytherapy can also be affected by chemotherapy, external radiation therapy and/or surgery. However, the effects of these other treatments will not be discussed here.

*These side effects don't always happen. Their seriousness depends on the person, the type of disease, the dose of radiation, and the area treated.*

### Here is a list of possible side effects and when they tend to appear

#### *During treatment and in the weeks that follow*

Most of these side effects are temporary and will disappear within a few weeks after brachytherapy.

#### **Most common side effects**

- Fatigue
- Discomfort

#### **Possible side effects**

- Light bleeding
- Light vaginal discharge
- Low risk of diarrhea
- Low risk of burning when urinating
- Low risk of more frequent urination

#### **Very rare but serious side effects**

- Opening of the scar (dehiscence) in the internal end of the vagina

#### *In the months or years following treatment*

#### **Most common side effects**

- Vaginal dryness
- Narrowing and shortening of the vagina
- Pain during intercourse

#### **Very rare but serious side effects**

- Cancer caused by radiation therapy (the benefits of treatment outweigh this very low risk)



**418 691-5264**

*Rarely, other side effects may occur that we cannot predict.*

*However, if you develop side effects that are causing discomfort, **feel free to contact us.***



## Medical follow-up

Once the treatments are completed, your radiation oncologist will tell you when he want to see you again. You will receive a call with the date and time of your next appointment

### Recommendations **during** treatments

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- You can take baths and showers during the treatment period. Use a mild unscented soap.
- Wait about four weeks after the treatments before having sexual intercourse.
- Tell the radiation oncologist if you develop:
  - a fever;
  - persistent irritation;
  - foul-smelling discharge;
  - persistent discharge or bleeding;
  - severe pain in the treated area;
  - persistent pain when urinating.

### Recommendations **following** treatments

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- If you have vaginal dryness, you can use a personal lubricant during sexual intercourse.
- To help keep your vagina elastic and prevent discomfort during intercourse and pelvic exams, you can ask a nurse for a vaginal dilator after your treatments. You will receive a prescription and our nurse, or the nurse at the women's health clinic, will explain how to use it.





## Radio-oncologie

This guide contains recommendations consistent with the scientific information available at the time of publication in september 2023. However, these recommendations are no replacement for medical advice. If you have any questions, please speak to your health provider.

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