



Chemotherapy and Safety in the Home



Chemotherapy is a very strong medicine that is used to treat cancer. Special safety measures are needed to help prevent the chemotherapy from touching others by mistake. Equipment and items like needles, that contact or touch chemotherapy medicine, are seen as contaminated and hazardous.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide information on how to safely handle chemotherapy and the waste from chemotherapy in your home.

How does the body get rid of chemotherapy?

The body gets rid of chemotherapy in the urine and the stool. Regardless of how you take this medicine, it can stay in your body for hours and sometimes even days after the treatment is finished. Traces of chemotherapy may also be present in vomit, vaginal fluid and semen.

Pregnant women should never touch or handle chemotherapy medication and contaminated waste.

What should I do when I go to the bathroom?

You may use the toilet as you normally would. However, for the first two days (48 hours) after receiving chemotherapy, you should flush the toilet two (2) times with the lid closed when you go to the bathroom. This is to make certain there is no waste left in the toilet.

Sharing the bathroom with your family is safe as long as all urine and stool are cleaned from the toilet. Septic and sewer systems are not affected.

Wash your hands well with soap and water afterward, and wash your skin if urine or stool gets on it.

If you use a bedpan, urinal or commode, wear gloves when cleaning or emptying containers. Wash the container daily with soap and water.

What should I do if I do not have control of my bladder or bowel?

Use a plastic-backed pad, a disposable diaper or a sheet to absorb urine or stool. Change your soiled clothes right away and wash your skin with soap and water.

If you have an ostomy, gloves need to be worn when emptying or changing bags.

Put all disposable ostomy supplies and gloves into two plastic bags and throw away with your regular garbage.

How do I care for my skin?

Chemotherapy can irritate the skin. If you accidentally touch chemotherapy, carefully wash the area with soap and water, then dry. When an irritation or redness lasts for more than one hour, call your doctor.

To prevent chemotherapy from touching the skin, wear gloves when working with chemotherapy, equipment and waste.

What should I do if chemotherapy gets into my eyes?

If any chemotherapy splashes into your eyes, flush them with water for 10-15 minutes and call your doctor.

What should I do with my laundry?

Wash your clothing and bed linen as you normally would **unless** they become soiled with chemotherapy.

If this happens, use gloves to carefully handle the laundry and to avoid contact with your skin. Wash the contaminated laundry two (2) times. **Do not wash** contaminated laundry with regular laundry.

If you do not have a washer, place the soiled items in a plastic bag and seal it with rubber bands until they can be washed at the laundromat.

How should I store the chemotherapy?

Store chemotherapy and equipment in a safe place that is out of reach of children and pets. Do not store chemotherapy in the bathroom because humidity can damage the medicine. Check the labels to see if the chemotherapy should be kept in a refrigerator or away from light. Be sure that all your medicines have correct labels.

Can I put chemotherapy waste in the garbage?

No. Chemotherapy waste is hazardous and needs special handling. If you are getting IV chemotherapy at home, you will be given a special container to store chemotherapy and equipment like used syringes, needles, tubing, bags, cassettes and vials.

When you finish handling the chemotherapy, place any equipment, needles, sharp objects and gloves into hard plastic containers labeled “Chemotherapy Waste” or “Cytotoxic” and make certain they are shut tight.

Equipment and waste that is too large for the plastic container needs to be placed in a separate plastic bag and sealed tightly with rubber bands.

What if I spill the chemotherapy?

A **Home Spill Kit** will be provided for people who have intravenous or IV chemotherapy treatments in the home.

This kit contains all the materials you need to safely clean up the chemotherapy in case you spill some of the medicine by accident. Your nurse will give you the information and provide you with written instructions on how to clean a chemotherapy spill.

Is it safe for family members to have contact with me during my chemotherapy?

Eating together, enjoying your favourite activities and hugging are all safe for you to do.

What if I become sick and vomit?

Chemotherapy may be present in vomit. Wear gloves when cleaning vomit and emptying the basin. Rinse the container with water after each use, and wash it with soap and water at least once a day.

Is it safe to have sex during my treatment?

Traces of chemotherapy may be present in vaginal fluid and semen for up to 48 hours after treatment. A condom must be used.

It is also possible to become pregnant or father a child while receiving chemotherapy. You will need to use a reliable birth control method (e.g., condom) while getting chemotherapy.

Please talk to your doctor or nurse about being sexually active during the time you have chemotherapy treatments.

Can I travel with my chemotherapy?

Traveling is usually not a problem. However, you may need to make special arrangements if the chemotherapy requires special storage, like refrigeration. Talk to your nurse, doctor or pharmacist for more instructions. Regardless of how you travel, always seal your chemotherapy medicine in a plastic bag.

Staying in a hotel during your chemotherapy treatment?

Be sure to take your **Home Spill Kit** with you when you travel. Notify hotel staff should you have an accident, and inform them of necessary cleaning requirements.