



Chemotherapy Precautions at Home

You are receiving chemotherapy to treat your cancer. You must take special precautions to prevent the chemotherapy from coming into accidental contact with others. This document teaches you and your family how to avoid exposure to chemotherapy and how to handle the waste from the chemotherapy in your home.

Chemotherapy Drugs Are Hazardous

Chemotherapy drugs are hazardous. Equipment or items that come into contact with the medicines (such as syringes, needles) are considered contaminated. Regardless of how you take the medications, chemotherapy remains in your body for many hours and sometimes days after your treatment. Your body eliminates the chemotherapy in urine and stool. Traces of chemotherapy also may be present in vomit.

Body Wastes

You may use the toilet (septic tank or sewers) as usual. Flush twice with the lid closed for 48 hours after receiving chemotherapy. Wash your hands well with soap and water afterward, and wash your skin if urine or stool gets on it. Pregnant women should avoid direct contact with chemotherapy or contaminated waste. Women and men should sit to urinate.

Laundry

Wash your clothing or linen normally unless they become soiled with chemotherapy. If that happens, put on gloves and handle the laundry carefully to avoid getting drug on your hands. Immediately place the contaminated items in the washer and wash as usual. Do not wash other items with chemotherapy-soiled items. If you do not have a washer, place soiled items in a plastic bag until they can be washed.

Skin Care

Chemotherapy spilled on skin may cause irritation. If this happens, thoroughly wash the area with soap and water, then dry. If redness lasts more than one hour or if irritation occurs, call your doctor. To prevent chemotherapy from being absorbed through the skin, wear gloves when working with chemotherapy, equipment, or waste.

Eye Care

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



Questions and Answers

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

Yes. Eating together, enjoying favorite activities, hugging, and kissing are all safe.

Is it safe for family members to use the same toilet as I do?

Yes. As long as any chemotherapy waste is cleaned from the toilet, sharing is safe.

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

Use a disposable, plastic-backed pad, diaper, or sheet to absorb urine or stool. Change immediately when soiled and wash skin with soap and water. If you have an ostomy, your caregiver should wear gloves when emptying or changing the bags.

What if I use a bedpan, urinal, or commode?

Your caregiver should wear gloves when emptying body wastes. Rinse the container with water after each use, and wash it with soap and water at least once a day.

What if I vomit?

Your caregiver should wear gloves when 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 be sexually active during my treatment?

Ask your doctor or your nurse this question. It is possible that traces of chemotherapy may be present in vaginal fluid and semen for up to 48 hours after treatment. Special precautions may be necessary.

How should I store chemotherapy at home?

Store chemotherapy and equipment in a safe place, out of reach of children and pets. Do not store chemotherapy in the bathroom, as high humidity may damage the drugs. Check medicine labels to see if your chemotherapy should be kept in the refrigerator or away from light. Be sure all medicines are completely labeled.

Is it safe to dispose of chemotherapy in the trash?

No. Chemotherapy waste is hazardous and should be handled separately. If you are receiving IV chemotherapy at home, you should have a special waste container for the chemotherapy and equipment. This included used syringes, needles, tubing, bags, cassettes, and vials. This container should be hard plastic and labeled "Hazardous Waste" or "Chemotherapy".

Can I travel with my chemotherapy?

Yes. Usually, traveling is no problem. However, because some chemotherapy requires special storage (such as refrigeration), you may need to make special arrangements. Check with your nurse, doctor, or medicine supplier for further instructions. Regardless of your means of travel (airplane, car or other), always seal your chemotherapy drugs in plastic bags.



What should I do if I spill some chemotherapy?

You will have a spill kit if you are receiving IV chemotherapy at home. In the event of a chemotherapy spill, open the spill kit and put on two pairs of gloves, the mask, gown, and goggles. Absorb the spill with the disposable sponge. Clean the area with soap and water. Dispose of all the materials – including gloves, mask, gown and goggles – in the chemotherapy container. Call the company who provides your chemo at home (Kennebec Pharmacy & Home Care).

These guidelines are the recommendations of the Oncology Nurses Society. Please do not hesitate to contact your oncology team at Harold Alfond Center for Cancer Care with any questions.



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