Chemotherapy and Home Safety

Chemotherapy (chemo) are drugs used to treat cancer. During and after treatment, these drugs are present in body fluids. Direct contact with body fluids at this time may cause skin irritation or other injury. This brochure will explain what precautions to take at home during and after chemo to prevent harm.

It takes 48 hours for your body to break down and get rid of most chemo drugs. During this period, people and pets should avoid direct contact with the chemo drug itself as well as:

- Blood.
- Vomit.
- Urine.
- Stool.
- Tears.
- Semen and vaginal fluid.

During chemo and the 48 hour period after chemo, follow the precautions listed below.

Body Fluids and Waste Precautions

In general, clean items with soap and warm water. Wear disposable gloves. Paper towels are preferred to cloths when cleaning any spills that may be contaminated with chemo.

Patients:

- If possible, use a separate toilet from other family members. If this is not possible, wear gloves to clean the toilet seat after each use.
- Men should sit on the toilet to urinate. This helps prevent urine from splashing outside the toilet.
- After using the toilet, **flush twice with lid closed.** This also helps reduce splashing and ensures all traces of the chemo drug have been flushed away. **Use the same precautions if vomiting into the toilet.**
- Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet.
- If any body fluids or waste contacted your skin, wash the area with soap and water.

Patients, Family, Caregivers:

Keep pets away from the toilet that is being used by the patient.

Please talk with your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.
Wear **double** gloves that are chemo safe (it will say this on the box) to:

- Clean the toilet.
- Clean any urine, stool, or vomit.
- Change diapers/incontinence pads. Please cleanse the patient’s skin with soap and water after each diaper or pad change. *(This prevents skin irritation from the chemo drug present in urine/stool.)*
- Empty/clean out a container with vomit.
  1. Carefully empty the container into the toilet to avoid spilling or splashing.
  2. Flush twice with the lid closed.
  3. Wash out the container with hot, soapy water – empty into the toilet and flush. Rinse and empty into the toilet. Flush.
  4. Dry the container with paper towels and dispose of in a trash bag.

**Double bag** any trash that has come into contact with chemo, including diapers, sanitary pads, or leaking chemo containers/bags.

- Ensure these bags are leak proof.
- You may receive special chemo disposal bags from your health care provider.

Keep any soiled laundry separate from regular laundry. This includes any clothes, linens, and towels that come in contact with chemo drugs or bodily fluids. Wash immediately after contact with soap and warm or hot water.

After using gloves:

- Wash hands *before* removing gloves. This prevents getting fluid/waste from the gloves onto your skin.
- Put soiled gloves in trash container. Then wash bare hands again to ensure the skin is free of contact with contaminated waste.

**Sexual Contact Precautions**

Some chemo drugs may also be found in semen and vaginal fluid. Please remember to use the following precautions to protect your partner during chemo and for 48 hours afterwards.

- Use condoms during sex. This is for all types of sexual intercourse including oral sex.
- Use an effective means of birth control for several months or longer after chemotherapy. Ask your doctor how long your treatment poses a risk and when you may safely try to become pregnant.
- Please know that:
  - Menstrual cycles can be irregular during and after treatment and cannot be used as a guide to prevent pregnancy.
  - Chemotherapy can have harmful side effects to an unborn child, especially in the first three months of pregnancy.
Family Safety

Contact with your loved ones is generally safe. Your health care provider will tell you if your specific treatment requires you to avoid close contact with others.

- Hugging and kissing is safe. This includes family, friends, pregnant women, and children.
- If possible, pregnant women should not clean up spills or have contact with soiled items.
- Bathrooms can be shared. However, please follow the Body Fluids and Waste Precautions as explained above.

Medication Precautions

If you need to handle chemo drugs (pill, liquid or intravenous form), please follow these guidelines.

Medications should be stored:

- In the original container.
- Away from children and pets.
- Not in the bathroom -- high humidity may damage the drug.
- In a sealed bag if refrigeration is needed.

When handling chemo drugs:

- Wash your hands before and after touching. Caregivers should wear gloves to handle the medications.
- Do not crush or break open pills or capsules unless instructed by your doctor.
- Pregnant women should NOT handle chemo drugs.

To dispose of medications:

- Do not throw away left over drugs in the trash. Put the drug in a plastic bag and give to your healthcare provider or follow their instructions for disposal.

Tips

- Ask if there is anything else to do or avoid during chemo.
- Ask what side effects or problems should be reported to the doctor.