

## Chemotherapy and Home Safety

Chemotherapy (chemo) is a cancer treatment that uses medicine. During and after treatment, this medicine is 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.

*Please talk with your physician or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.*

***It takes 7 days for your body to break down and get rid of most chemo medicine.*** During this period, people and pets should avoid direct contact with the chemo medicine itself as well as your:

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

**During chemo and the 7-day 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 with the lid closed**. This also helps reduce splashing and ensures all traces of the chemo medicine 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 and caregivers:**

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

Wear **double** gloves that are chemo safe (it will say this on the box) when:

- Cleaning the toilet.
- Cleaning any urine, stool or vomit.
- Changing diapers and 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 and stool.)*
- Emptying and cleaning out a container with vomit.
  1. Carefully empty the container into the toilet to avoid spilling or splashing.
  2. Flush 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 them in a trash bag.

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

Keep any soiled laundry separate from regular laundry. This includes any clothes, linens and towels that come in contact with chemo medicine 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 or 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 medicine may also be found in semen and vaginal fluid. Please remember to use the following precautions to protect your partner **during chemo and for 7 days afterwards**.

- Use condoms during sex. This is for all types of sexual intercourse including oral sex.
- When your treatments are completed, talk with your physician about 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 3 months of pregnancy.

## Family safety

Contact with your loved ones is generally safe. Your healthcare 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 on pages 1 and 2.

## Medication precautions

If you need to handle chemo medicine (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 since high humidity may damage the medicine.
- In a sealed bag if refrigeration is needed.

When handling chemo medicine:

- Wear gloves. Wash your hands before and after removing the gloves.
- Do not crush or break open pills or capsules unless instructed by your physician.
- Pregnant women should NOT handle chemo medicine.

To dispose of medications:

- Do not throw leftover medicine in the trash. Put it 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 physician.

## Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at [hlc@nm.org](mailto:hlc@nm.org), or by calling 312.926.5465. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at [nm.org](http://nm.org).

*Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.*

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

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