

Chemotherapy Safety at Home

The medicines you take to treat your cancer are called chemotherapy or chemo. They are strong chemicals that could harm others in your home. This factsheet has information to help you handle chemo safely.

Chemo treatment at home

Many things are safe to do while you take chemo, including touching, kissing, eating together and sharing a bathroom.

There are also important things you need to know:

- Only the patient who is on chemo should take or touch it.
- Chemo medicines take about a week to exit the body.
- Traces of chemo can be in your urine, stool, semen, vaginal fluid, and vomit.
- The chemo medicine stays on anything it touches until disposed of or properly washed away.
- Pregnant women and children should not handle these medicines.

Store chemo and equipment out of reach of children and pets. Do not store chemo in the bathroom. Check the medicine label to see if the chemo needs to be stored in the refrigerator or away from light. If you need to keep it in the refrigerator, put the medicine in a labeled plastic bag. Do not let the bag touch any food.

Oral Chemotherapy. Do not crush, cut, or open your chemo pills. Do not allow anyone else to handle them. Keep your medicine in its original container.

Here are three ways to get rid of empty or partial bottles of oral chemo, in order of preference:

- Take them to one of the drop-off locations listed here: <https://knowyourscrip.org/>.
- Ask the HCI pharmacy for a waste envelope to mail empty or partial bottles of oral chemo to a collection facility.
- Place empty containers in a sealable plastic bag and put the bag in the garbage can for pickup.

IV Chemotherapy. If you spill chemo, follow the instructions on the spill kit your cancer care team gave you.

If chemo gets on your skin, wash the area right away with soap and water. Pat dry. If redness or irritation lasts more than 1 hour, tell your cancer care team.

You may seal the used chemo container and tubing in the chemotherapy waste bag your cancer care team gave you. Put the bag in the garbage can for pickup. Before throwing medicine containers away, remove any labels that have your information.

Safety Steps

Whether you take chemo treatments at the hospital or at home, please take these steps for 7 days after chemo to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Handwashing

Handwashing is the best way to remove chemo from your skin. Wash your hands before and after doing these things:

- Eating
- Preparing food
- Going to the bathroom
- Handling body fluids
- Blowing your nose
- Coughing or sneezing on your hands

Handling body fluids and waste for patients and caregivers

- It is safe to share a bathroom with others while taking chemo
- Sit down to urinate to prevent splashing
- Follow these steps after you use the toilet:
 - Clean any splashes that might be on the toilet. Disinfecting wipes work well for this. Do not flush these wipes. Throw them away in a sealed bag.
 - Wash your hands with soap and water right away.
 - If urine or stool gets on your skin, wash the area with soap and water right away.

- When handling body fluids, always wear disposable gloves. Use the gloves only once. When removing gloves, pull them off inside out. Put them in a sealable plastic bag, then the trash. Wash your hands with soap and water after you take off the gloves.
- If a bedpan or urinal is used, wear gloves when emptying and cleaning out the waste. Slowly empty the contents into the toilet to prevent splashing. Rinse the container with water after each use. Wash the container with soap and water once a day.
- If you have an ostomy, wear gloves when you empty the bag. Wash the bag with soap and water once a day.
- If you do not have control of your bladder or bowels, use a disposable pad, diaper, or plastic-backed sheet to protect the bed or furniture. Change them right away when they are soiled. Wear gloves when handling the soiled items.
- Handle containers used for vomit with gloves. Slowly empty the contents into the toilet to prevent splashing. Flush the toilet twice. Wash the container with soap and water after use.

Handling laundry

You can wash clothing and bedding that has not touched chemo or body fluids as usual. If chemo or body fluids gets on clothing or bedding, follow these steps:

- Wear gloves when you touch laundry that has chemo or body fluids on it. Afterward, take off the gloves and put them in a sealable plastic bag. Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Wash this laundry right away, if possible. You may put it in a sealable bag if it must wait.
- Wash this laundry twice in a separate load. Wash two times with regular detergent in hot water.

Handling trash

- Wear gloves when handling anything that has touched chemo or body fluids.
- Put sharp objects such as needles in a hard-plastic container. Write the word “Sharps” on the outside.
 - You may use large, empty plastic bottles with a cap, such as a milk bottle. Your home care agency may provide a medical sharps container. When the container is full, tightly seal the cap. Put it in your garbage can for pickup.
- Put other trash that has touched chemo or body fluids in sealed plastic bags. This includes empty bags for IV chemo taken at home. Label the bags “chemotherapy waste.” Put the bags in your garbage can for pickup.

Sexual contact

- Wear a condom if you or your partner have received chemotherapy in the past 7 days.
- Most patients need to avoid pregnancy for 6 months to 1 year. The time may be shorter or longer, depending on your situation. Tell your doctor right away if you think you or your partner might be pregnant.
- To prevent pregnancy, use two reliable forms of birth control when you have sex.