

Anticancer drug safety at home

Anticancer drugs that you may take are either chemotherapy or biologic therapy. These types of drugs can be taken by mouth as a pill, tablet or capsule. Some may be given through an Intravenous line (IV). These drugs kill or stop cancer cells from growing. They can also damage normal cells. It is important to prevent the drugs from touching you and others by mistake. The actual risk of harm is quite low, but there are safety measures that you need to take.

This handout describes tips to safely handle anticancer drugs and the waste from these drugs at home. By following these tips, you can lessen the chance of exposing yourself and the environment to these drugs.

The drugs can stay in the body up to 7 days. All of the drug is not entirely used by the body. The drug can leave the body in vomit, blood, perspiration/sweat, urine and bowel movements. These body wastes can contain small amounts of anticancer drugs.



- If there is a chance of coming into contact with the drug or items contaminated with the drug, you, your caregiver or your home care provider must wear gloves.
- If during the treatment you call EMS, visit your dentist or other health care provider, please inform them that you are/have been receiving anticancer drugs.

How do I clean up body wastes?

- Clean up as soon as you can. Keep pets and those not helping with the clean up away from the area.
- Always wear 2 pairs of disposable gloves to clean up any body waste, to change diapers, adult briefs or pads and when handling soiled items. You can buy disposable gloves at your local drug store.
- Put body wastes from soiled items into the toilet. Close the lid and flush the toilet 2 times.
- Wear 2 pairs of disposable gloves when emptying used bedpans or containers. Avoid splashing while emptying into the toilet. Rinse well with detergent and water, and put rinse water in the toilet. Close the lid and flush the toilet 2 times.

How do I clean up body wastes?

- Use paper towels, disposable cloths or toilet paper to wipe up any spilled waste. Clean the area very well with a household cleaner and rinse.
- Double bag disposable items, diapers, adult briefs or pads, and clean up supplies. Be sure to store garbage in a safe place, away from children and pets. Dispose in regular garbage.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after removing gloves.
- Wash soiled articles separately in your washing machine twice, in hot water with regular detergent. If not soiled, they may be washed with the regular laundry.

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

Yes. As long as any waste is cleaned from the toilet, sharing is safe. Close the lid and flush the toilet 2 times after using. Wash your hands with soap and water. Men are encouraged to sit down when urinating to avoid splashing of urine that contains anticancer drugs.

How else can I be exposed to anticancer drugs?

- By touching anticancer drugs.
- By an IV chemo spill or leak.

How do I handle anticancer pills, tablets or capsules?

- When you take your drug, wash your hands before and afterwards.
- If you are a caregiver, do not pick up pills, tablets or capsules with your bare hands, wear disposable gloves.
- If possible, tap the medication from the bottle into a small cup or the bottle cap before giving or taking it.
- If you drop a pill or capsule, pick it up with a glove.
- You can bring unused medications back to the Cancer Centre in a double sealed bag or pill bottle. You can also check with your local drug store and bring them there.
- Do not flush unused pills, tablets or capsules down the toilet.



Wash your hands (even if you have worn gloves) before and after contact with the drugs.

What if I get the drugs on my skin or in my eyes?

If you get the drugs on your skin it may cause irritation (redness, rash).

Wash the area right away with soap and water then dry. If you have redness or a rash, contact your doctor.

If the drug splashes into your eye, flush the eye with tap water for at least 15 minutes and contact your doctor.

Is it safe to have sex while on anticancer drugs?

It is possible that there are traces of the drug in vaginal fluid and semen for up to 7 days after treatment. The use of condoms is recommended to protect your partner. Special precautions may be needed. Please talk with your doctor or nurse about your concerns.

What if I have an IV chemotherapy spill at home?

A spill means any amount of chemotherapy.

- Do not reconnect your chemotherapy if it has become disconnected – it is considered contaminated.
- If you have a central venous access device, it should be clamped right away.
- If you have a PICC, there will not be a clamp – place the chemo bottle in the 2 ziplock bags supplied. If a PICC becomes disconnected the end should be wrapped in gauze to keep end as clean as possible.
- Chemo should be cleaned up right away. Contain the area so no children or pets are exposed.
- Do not touch the chemo. Use the spill kit provided and follow the instructions in the spill kit.
- Call your primary team and tell them about the spill.
- Double bag the spill kit (use 2 plastic bags) and bring it back to the Cancer Centre (Chemo Suite or Pharmacy) for proper disposal.
- Call your home care nurse to come and flush your central line as soon as possible.

Other safety tips

- Always wash your hands before eating or drinking.
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should avoid handling anticancer, cleaning up spills, leaks and body waste. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, talk with your doctor or nurse.
- If you are on IV chemo overnight, put a protective sheet or plastic over the mattress under the sheet. Keep children and animals out of the bed to avoid tangling the lines and to reduce chances of disconnecting the tubing.
- If you have problems with bladder or bowel control, use disposable bed pads or wear adult briefs.
- Avoid friends/family that are ill.
- Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Store drugs in containers that are protected from puncture or breakage.
- Store drugs in an area free from moisture and extreme temperatures.
- Store anticancer drugs in a separate container from other medications.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for 2 minutes, rinse and then dry (even if you have worn gloves), before and after contact with anticancer drugs and/or bodily fluids.



- Always tell your doctor or nurse if you or your caregivers have been exposed to these drugs.
- If you have any questions or concerns about anticancer drug safety please ask.



Juravinski Cancer Centre
699 Concession Street
Hamilton, Ontario L8V 5C2
905-387-9495

PD 9305 – 04/2016
dpc/pted/AntiCancerDrugsSafetyHome -JCC-th.docx
dt/April 13, 2016