

Chemotherapy safety at home

Chemotherapy is a way of treating cancer using medicines. It is important to reduce the chance of other people coming in to contact with your chemotherapy medicines by taking some safety precautions. This information sheet explains when you need to take these precautions and what you need to do.

There are different types of chemotherapy medicines. Some people have chemotherapy treatment in hospital, while others have chemotherapy at home.

Chemotherapy is used to treat cancer and other diseases. Chemotherapy works by damaging or killing cancer cells, but it can also damage normal healthy cells.

It's important to reduce the chance of other people coming in to contact with your chemotherapy. This includes taking care with body fluids that may contain chemotherapy.

Important

Children, and people who are pregnant or breastfeeding, should not touch chemotherapy medicines or body fluids that might have chemotherapy in them.

Chemotherapy and body fluids

Body fluids are liquids in the body. They include blood, urine (wee), faeces (poo), mucus (phlegm), saliva (spit), vomit, semen and vaginal fluid.

Chemotherapy stays in your body fluids for some time after each treatment.

How long it stays in body fluids can vary from one person to another and depends on the chemotherapy medicine you have.

- Most chemotherapy stays in body fluids for about 48 hours after each treatment
- Some can stay there for up to seven days
- If you have continuous chemotherapy, it can be in your body for up to seven days after your last dose

Having chemotherapy at home

If you have chemotherapy at home, you should use the precautions described in this information sheet. You also need to store and handle your chemotherapy safely.

Chemotherapy as tablets or injections

- Store all tablets, capsules, liquids and injections in a safe place away from children and animals, and follow the directions for storage on the label.
- Dispose of all needles and syringes in an appropriate container. Your nurse or pharmacist will speak to you about safe disposal. They will also give you the right type of container for this.
- Return all leftover medicines to your local or hospital pharmacy for safe disposal.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after giving medications or handling any waste.
- Family members and carers should not touch chemotherapy tablets, capsules or liquids. If you cannot avoid this, they should use gloves when handling them. Ask your nurse or pharmacist how to take your medicines safely.

Chemotherapy through a pump

- Your doctor or nurse will explain how the pump works, and what to do if you have any problems.
- Your nurse will teach you how to look after and check the pump and how to stop it using the clamp.
- If you notice a spill or a leak from your pump, stop the pump by clamping it and clean up the spill as described in the table. Contact your doctor or nurse immediately for further instructions or go to your nearest emergency department for help.

When should I use safety precautions?

You should take safety precautions if you have chemotherapy in hospital and/or at home.

- You should take precautions with body fluids during each treatment as the chemotherapy can take from 48 hours up to seven days to leave your body.
- Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist how long you should take precautions for.

Precautions to take at home

These precautions reduce the chance of your family members, carers and friends coming into contact with chemotherapy. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about which precautions to use with your treatment.

Going to the toilet

- Sit down on the toilet seat when using the toilet.
- After using the toilet, close the lid and then flush the toilet using a full flush.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- If you have bladder and/or bowel incontinence, use sanitary/incontinence pads and put protectors on cushions and mattresses.

Disposing of used incontinence pads, nappies, colostomy or urine bags

- Wear disposable gloves to put the items in a plastic bag without any holes.
- Put the used gloves in the bag as well, tie up the bag and put it in the general rubbish bin.
- If you are incontinent, wash your skin with soap and water after removing your pad.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.

Managing vomiting

Vomit into either a plastic bowl or a plastic bag with no holes.

- If using a plastic bowl:
 - Wear disposable gloves to empty the vomit into the toilet carefully.
 - Close the toilet lid and then flush using a full flush.
 - If you had your chemotherapy treatment within the last 48 hours (2 days) or you have a chemotherapy pump, flush the toilet a second time.
 - Wash the bowl with soapy water, rinse with clean water and dry with paper towels.
 - Put the disposable gloves in a plastic bag with no holes, tie up the bag and put it in the general rubbish bin.
 - Wash your hands with soap and water.
 - Use this bowl only for collecting vomit and throw the bowl out when you have finished your chemotherapy treatment.
- If using a plastic bag:
 - Seal it and dispose it in the rubbish bin.
 - If the plastic bag is thin or damaged, place it in another bag.
 - Wash your hands with soap and water.

Cleaning up body fluid spills

- Wear disposable gloves and use paper towels to soak up the spill.
- Use disposable cloths and soapy water to wash down surfaces the spill is on.
- Then wipe dry with paper towels.
- Put the used paper towels, cloths and gloves in a plastic bag, tie it up and dispose it in the general rubbish bin.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.

Washing clothes, towels or bedding with body fluids on them

- Wear disposable gloves to touch these items.
- Wash the items straight away. If this is not possible, place them in a sealed plastic bag until they can be washed.
- After putting the items in the washing machine, put the disposable gloves into a plastic bag, tie up the bag and put it in the general rubbish bin.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after touching any soiled linen or clothing.
- Avoid hand washing these items. Wash them on their own in the washing machine on the longest cycle in either hot or cold water with detergent.
- Run the full wash cycle a second time – clean items 2 times in total.
- Dry the washed items outside the house, if possible.
- After they're washed and dried, the items can be used as normal.

Contact with the eyes or skin

- If chemotherapy splashes into your eyes, rinse them with water or eyewash (artificial tears) for 10-15 minutes. Contact your doctor or nurse **immediately** for further instruction.
- For other body areas, wash the affected area **immediately** with soap and water. If there is any redness or irritation like stinging, contact your doctor or nurse for advice.

Sex and protection

- Your doctor or nurse will talk to you about you and your partner using effective birth control to prevent pregnancy during your treatment. This is because chemotherapy medicines can harm an unborn baby.
 - You should also use a condom, dental dam or other physical barrier if you have any type of sex after each treatment.
 - Clean any sex toys or aids you use with soapy water and dry them with paper towel.
 - This is to reduce exposure of your partner to these medicines in semen or vaginal fluids. This usually applies for 48 hours but may be up to seven days for certain medicines. Your doctor or nurse will tell you how many days.
 - Avoid open mouth kissing for 48 hours and up to seven days after chemotherapy treatment as your saliva may contain chemotherapy medicine.
 - Ask your doctor or nurse any questions you have about safe sex during your treatment.
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Common questions

Can I hug and touch my family?

Yes, it is safe to touch and hug other people.

Can other people use the same toilet as me?

Yes, others may use the same toilet. If body fluids splash on the toilet seat, wear disposable gloves and wash the area down with soapy water before other people use the toilet.

Can other people use the same drinking glass and utensils as me?

Yes, others may use the same drinking glass and utensils as you, provided they are washed with water and detergent in-between use.



For information for patient and carers please scan the QR code.

Things to ask your doctor or nurse

- What are the daytime and after hours contact number?
- When should I call you?
- When should I go to the Emergency department?
- How long will I have to use safety precautions?

Contact numbers

Daytime: _____

Night/weekend: _____

Do you need an interpreter?

- Professional interpreters are available if you need help understanding or speaking English.
- When you make your appointment, say that you need an interpreter.
- It is your right to ask for an interpreter.
- Interpreter services are free and confidential.
- The Translating and Interpreter Service (TIS) has interpreters available by telephone on 13 14 50.