Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

How to Safely Handle Chemotherapy and Biotherapy at Home

This information will help you or your caregiver handle chemotherapy and biotherapy safely at home.

Touching your chemotherapy and biotherapy medicine

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds before and after touching your medicine.
- If your caregiver is helping you, they'll need to wear disposable gloves. They should throw the gloves away after using them and wash their hands.
- Do not let anyone that is pregnant or breastfeeding touch your medicine.
- Do not crush, break, or open any pills or capsules unless your healthcare provider instructs you to. To learn more about oral chemotherapy, read *How to Safely Handle Oral Chemotherapy* (www.mskcc.org/pe/oral-chemotherapy).

- If a child or pet accidentally swallows your medicine, call Poison Control right away at 800-222-1222.

How to store your chemotherapy and biotherapy medicine

- Your nurse or pharmacist may have given you special instructions on how to store your medicine. Follow their instructions.
- Keep your chemotherapy and biotherapy medicine in their original pill bottle. Do not put them in a pill box unless a member of your care team tells you to.
- Make sure your medicine containers are sealed and stored away from children and pets.
- Keep your medicine in a cool, dry place away from heat, sunlight, or moisture.
- Do not let chemotherapy or biotherapy medicine come in contact with your other medicines. They should always be separate.
- Your medicine may need to be in the refrigerator. Store the medicine container inside another container or in a sealed bag. Make sure it does not touch any food.

Disposing your chemotherapy and biotherapy medicine

- If you have any leftover or expired medicine, you can bring them to MSK pharmacy's medicine drop box to get rid of them. The drop box is located at the 425 East 67th Street entrance of the Haupt building. There may be other drop boxes in your community. To learn more, read *How to Get Rid of Unused Medicine* (www.mskcc.org/pe/get-rid-unused-medicine).
- Your healthcare provider cannot get rid of your medicine for you. Do not bring them to your appointment.
- Do not recycle or reuse empty pill bottles or containers for your cancer medicine. You can throw empty pill bottles in the trash.
- To learn more about storing and disposing of sharps, follow the instructions in the resource *How To Store and Get Rid of Your Home Medical Sharps* (www.mskcc.org/pe/sharps).

How to clean intravenous (IV) medicine leaks and spills

Check the connections of your IV tubing 2 times a day. Make sure they're tight and not leaking. If your medicine

leaks or spills, follow the guidelines in this section. For a quick reference, read our resource *Follow the 4 Cs if Your Chemo Leaks or Spills* (www.mskcc.org/pe/4-cs-leaks-spills).

Make a spill kit

You should be ready to clean up medicine leaks or spills while you're getting continuous IV chemotherapy at home. Make a spill kit that has the following supplies. Keep the kit where you can easily reach it.

- 2 pairs of disposable gloves
- Paper towels or an absorbent towel that can be thrown away
- Dish soap or laundry detergent
- 2 plastic bags that seal (1 gallon size or larger)

What to do if your IV connection is leaking

If your IV connection is leaking, follow these steps:

1. Put on 2 pairs of disposable gloves.
2. Cover the connection with a paper towel and wrap a plastic bag around the connection.
3. Clamp the tubing.
4. If you have a pump, turn it off.
5. Call your healthcare provider right away for more

instructions.

If your liquid chemotherapy or biotherapy medicine spills:

1. Put on 2 pairs of disposable gloves.
2. Clamp the tubing.
3. If you have a pump, turn it off
4. Place the following in plastic bags and seal the bags tightly:
    - Any remaining medicine.
    - Any container, pump, or tubing used to deliver the medicine.
    - Your carrying case for your equipment, if you have one.
5. Soak up the spill with paper towels.
6. Clean the area with dish soap or laundry detergent and water. Rinse with clean water.
7. Place all the supplies you used to clean the spill in a plastic bag.
8. Take off your gloves. Put them in the plastic bag with the other supplies. Seal the bag tightly.
9. Place the sealed bag in another bag that seals tightly.
0. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

11. Call your healthcare provider's office for instructions on how to dispose of the medicine, equipment, and cleaning supplies.

What to do if your medicine gets on your skin or in your eyes

If your medicine gets on your skin, wash the area with soap and water. Call your healthcare provider if you have any redness, pain, or burning on your skin.

If your medicine splashes in your eyes, rinse them with running water right away. Keep the water flowing over your **open** eyes for 10 to 15 minutes. Call your healthcare provider to ask for more instructions.

What to do if your medicine gets on your clothing or linens

1. Put on a pair of disposable gloves.
2. Make sure that the items with medicine on them don't touch any part of your body.
3. Wash the clothing and linens in hot water. **Do not wash them with any other items.**
4. If possible, wash the dirty clothes and linens right away. If you cannot wash them right away, put them in a plastic bag until they can be washed.

How to handle body fluids

Your medicine may show up in your body fluids during and after your therapy. This includes your:

- Urine (pee)
- Bowel movements (poop)
- Vomit (throw up)
- Saliva
- Vaginal fluid
- Semen

Most chemotherapy medicine leaves the body within 48 hours (2 days) after treatment. But some may take up to 7 days. Talk with your care team if you have any questions.

Follow these guidelines for handling body fluids after your treatment.

- Always sit to urinate (pee). Close the toilet lid and flush twice after using the toilet.
- Try to use a separate toilet from your family members, if possible. You may have to use the same toilet as your family. If so, clean the seat and rim with disinfecting sanitizing wipes after you use it. Keep these wipes in the bathroom. After 48 hours (2 days), clean and sanitize the toilet and bathroom floor.

- You and your caregiver should wear 2 pairs of disposable gloves when:
  - Emptying or rinsing containers, such as a bedpan, urinal, or commode.
  - Handling dirty diapers.
  - Cleaning up urine, vomit, bowel movements, saliva, vaginal fluid, or semen.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after removing your disposable gloves.
- Place all diapers in a sealed bag and place the sealed bag in another bag. Then, put it in the trash.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after using the toilet.
- Wash any area of your skin that comes into contact with urine, bowel movements, vomit, or other body fluids with soap and water.
- Keep children and pets from playing in or drinking from the toilet.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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