

Chemotherapy Safety at Home



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Why is safe handling of chemotherapy important?

Chemotherapy is a cytotoxic medication, which means that it is poisonous to cells. It is important to take precautions to protect yourself and your family.

How do I safely store the medication?

- ▶ Store the medication in a sealed plastic container. Keep the medication out of reach of children and pets, and away from food. Store in a dry place (not the kitchen or bathroom).
- ▶ All expired or unused medication should be returned to the BC Children's Hospital Pharmacy.

How do I safely prepare the medication?

Find a place away from windows, heat ducts or fans and food preparation areas to prepare the medication. Always wear gloves when handling chemotherapy. If you use disposable gloves, remove them carefully, turning them inside out, then seal them in a plastic bag. If you use rubber gloves, wash the outside with soapy water before removing them. The powdered form of the medication can be mixed with a small amount of soft food or fluid that your child will take.

Pill Crushing/Pill Cutting:

Step 1: Cover the area in which you will prepare the medication with a paper towel.

Step 2: Put on mask, gloves, and goggles, to protect yourself from the powder and splashes.

Step 3: Crush or cut the pill by using a commercial pill crusher or cutter which can be purchased from your local drug store (not a spoon or rolling pin, for example).

Mixing with Food

Step 4: Add a small amount of soft food to the powder in the pill crusher and stir or add the cut pill to a spoonful of food.

Step 5: Give the dose of medication immediately after mixing.

Step 6: Wash the surface and pill crusher/cutter with soap and water.

Step 7: Remove the mask and gloves. Remove the goggles last (after the mask and gloves). Wash your hands with soap and water.

Or....

Mixing with Fluid

Step 4: Add a small amount of fluid to the powder in the pill crusher.

Step 5: Mix the solution well to dissolve the medication.

Step 6: Draw up the medication into a syringe.

Step 7: Give the dose of medication **immediately** after mixing.

Step 8: Wash the syringe and the counter surface with soap and water.

Step 9: Remove the mask and gloves. Remove the goggles last (after the mask and gloves). Wash your hands with soap and water.

Attention: Do not refrigerate or store mixed medication.

Skin Care for accidental splashes:

Wash the area thoroughly with soap and water. Dry the area and observe skin for the next 7 days. Contact your doctor if redness or irritation occurs.

If the drug splashes into your eye:

Flush the eye with tap water for at least 15 minutes and contact your doctor.

Handling Waste Safely

While your child is taking chemotherapy and during the first 48 hours after the last dose, some of the drug is broken down and removed from the body via waste (urine, stool, vomit). It is important that you protect yourself and others from chemotherapy byproducts. Here are some tips:

Protecting yourself and others:

- ▶ If possible try and designate one bathroom in your home for your child's use only.
- ▶ Have rubber or disposable gloves, paper towels, plastic bags, soapy water, and any other items you might need, available for quick clean up.

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- ▶ Always wear gloves when handling any waste or soiled items. After you remove the gloves, wash your hands carefully.
- ▶ Keep a disposable container (e.g. ice cream container, coffee can) close by in case your child vomits. Empty the waste into the toilet, and wash the container with soap and water.
- ▶ If your child has a problem with staying dry overnight, protect the mattress by using a plastic mattress cover.

Note: Try to avoid splashing or spilling urine, stool, or vomit. If this does happen, follow the guidelines for clean up.

What if I spill medication or body wastes?

- ▶ Clean up as soon as possible, and keep people and pets away from the area until the clean up is complete.
- ▶ Always wear gloves. Flush the waste down the toilet. Always close the lid before flushing. Flush twice.
- ▶ Use toilet paper, if possible, to clean up spills. Flush it down the toilet as above. If you use paper towels, seal them in a plastic bag and put it in the garbage.

How do I wash the laundry?

- ▶ Wash linens, clothes, and other washables soiled with waste first separately in the washing machine with hot soapy water. Wash a second time either separately or with your regular laundry.
- ▶ If the soiled laundry cannot be washed right away, store it in a sealed plastic bag.

How do I dispose of garbage?

- ▶ If your child is not toilet trained: Use disposable diapers. Flush the waste from inside the diaper down the toilet with the lid closed. Flush twice. Seal the rest of the diaper in a plastic bag and put it in the garbage.
- ▶ All other disposable items that come in contact with medication or body waste should be double bagged before being placed in the garbage (e.g. paper towels, gloves).

What supplies do I need to keep in my house?

Required:

- rubber or disposable gloves
- toilet paper or paper towels
- sealed plastic bags/zip-lock bags
- soap and water
- bucket for vomit.

If you are crushing or mixing medications, you may need: protective goggles, paper masks, commercial pill crusher or cutter and syringes.

If you have questions relating to your child's chemotherapy medication please contact:

Your clinic primary nurse or the oncologist on-call after hours.

References:

Kline, N.E. (Ed.). (2004). The pediatric chemotherapy and biotherapy curriculum. Glenville, IL: Association of Pediatric Oncology Nurses.

Capital Health. (2006). Cytotoxic manual: Administration and handling guidelines (version 2). Edmonton: Author.

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<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/OncHemBMT/ForFamilies/Parentinformation.htm>

BC Cancer Agency. (2006). Cancer Drug Manual: Safe Disposal of Waste at Home after Chemotherapy (Appendix 5). Retrieved March 5, 2007 from:

<http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/HPI/DrugDatabase/Appendices/Appendix5/SafeDisposalofWasteatHomeAfterChemotherapyPtInfo.htm>