

Handling Cancer Drugs and Body Fluids in the Home

This handout is for cancer patients, family members and caregivers. It contains advice on how to handle cancer drugs and body fluids of patients in the home during and after taking cancer drugs.

Handling Cancer Drugs

- Caregivers should wear gloves (rubber or medical exam gloves) when touching any cancer drug.
- Wash hands with soap and water when the gloves are taken off.
- People who are taking the cancer drugs do not need to wear gloves, but should wash their hands with soap and water after handling any cancer drugs.

Oral tablets and capsules

- Tablets of cancer drugs should not be crushed, broken or chewed; capsules should not be opened except when instructed to do so by a pharmacist.
- If it is hard for you to swallow the tablets or capsules, please contact a pharmacist.

Infusion pump (Infusor™):

- The chemotherapy nurse will teach you how to look after the Infusor™.
- If the cancer drug given through the Infusor™ accidentally leaks from the container, stop the leak, clean up the spill (see page 2 – How to clean up spilled cancer drug) and call the daytime or after hours contact number provided by the chemotherapy nurse.

Storing cancer drugs

- Store cancer drugs out of reach of children and pets.
- Unused cancer drugs should be returned to a pharmacy for disposal.

Handling Body Fluids

When you are taking cancer drugs, your body fluids will contain small amounts of the drug that you are taking. Although the drug will help you, the drug could cause problems for people who accidentally come in contact with it, but don't need it. Some examples of body fluids that will contain some of the cancer drug are: bowel movements (poo), urine (pee), blood, phlegm, mucus, saliva, vomit, semen and vaginal fluid. Although the risk is very low, it is important to be careful with your body fluids to keep those around you safe.

How long do we need to be careful?

Special handling of body fluids is usually needed for 48 hours after a single treatment. If a cancer drug is taken every day, special handling is needed the whole time, until 48 hours after you stop taking the drug.

Hugging, kissing and sex

Being with your loved one is an important part of life. Eating together, enjoying favourite activities, hugging and kissing (avoid deep kissing) are all safe to do.

Being sexually active is also safe; however, care needs to be taken. It is possible that very small amounts of cancer drugs are in vaginal fluid and semen. Therefore, it is recommended that a condom be used when having sex (whether it's vaginal, anal or oral) to prevent secretions from coming in contact with your partner's body. Some cancer drugs may require further precautions. Speak to a member of your cancer care team about being careful during sexual contact.

Going to the bathroom

- Male patients should sit down to urinate (pee).
- Before you flush, put the toilet lid down.
- Flush the toilet twice.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.

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- If there are any splashes or spills on or around the toilet, follow the instructions for spill clean up (below).
- You can share the same toilet and bathroom as long as any splashes or spills have been cleaned up.

During the special handling period, when caregivers are helping with the following tasks, they should wear gloves when handling body fluids or things that have come in contact with body fluids. Hands should be washed when gloves are removed.

If you throw up

- Keep a plastic pail nearby if you think that you are going to throw up.
- Vomit can be flushed down the toilet.
- Wash the pail out with soapy water after using it and dry with disposable paper towels.

Laundry and dishes

- Unsoiled clothing, sheets and towels can be washed together with regular laundry.
- Wash the soiled clothing, sheets and towels twice. First wash separately from other laundry in the washing machine, using hot water and regular laundry detergent; then wash a second time with regular laundry.
- Wash your dishes the normal way – you don't have to wash them separately or do anything special.

Protecting furniture

- If you have troubles holding your bladder or bowels, wear absorbent undergarments (adult diapers) and put a disposable plastic sheet (like a large garbage bag) or disposable plastic backed pad under your bed sheet to protect the mattress.
- Protect your couch, other cushions, car seats or carpeting by wearing absorbent undergarments (adult diapers) and by sitting on a disposable plastic sheet with a towel over it.

Handling garbage soiled with body fluids or cancer drugs

Special care must be taken when throwing out things that may be soiled with your body fluids or cancer drug.

- Examples of soiled items that should be disposed of using special care include: dressings, bandages, plastic sheets or pads, disposable undergarments, ostomy supplies, paper towels and medical exam gloves.
- Things that you can't flush down the toilet should be put in a plastic garbage bag, tied tightly, then put inside a second plastic garbage bag and thrown out with our regular garbage.

How to clean up spilled cancer drug or body fluids during the special handling period

- Clean up as soon as possible.
- Wear gloves and wash hands when gloves are removed.
- Use disposable supplies, like paper towels, to soak and wipe up as much of the spill as possible, then:
 - Clean surfaces with soapy water (e.g. dish detergent).
 - Rinse the area with water and wipe dry with paper towels.

What to do when skin or eyes come in contact with cancer drug or body fluids

- If a patient's body fluid or cancer drug splashes into anyone's eyes, rinse the eyes gently with water for 15 minutes.
- If skin comes in contact with the patient's body fluids or cancer drug, immediately wash the affected area with soap and water; repeat at least once.