

# Safe Handling of Chemotherapy at Home

## Receiving Chemotherapy Infusions at Home

You are receiving chemotherapy (chemo) infusions at home to treat your cancer. Outpatient treatment is convenient, but you and your family must take special precautions to ensure safety with these medicines. Chemo may cause harm to normal body cells. Follow these instructions to handle chemo during your treatment and for **48 hours** after you complete your infusion. If you follow these precautions, the people you live with and the environment will be safer from the medicine(s).

These precautions are for patients who take chemotherapy with the highest risk of harm due to accidental exposure. Talk with your Vascular Access and Procedures Center care team about any risks linked to your chemo and any possible changes that may be made to these precautions.

### Supplies

Caregivers should wear disposable gloves if they handle chemotherapy or if they handle or clean any items soiled by your bodily waste. You, the patient, do not necessarily need to wear gloves in such situations. Both you and your caregivers should wash your hands with soap and water after handling chemotherapy or bodily waste and after removing gloves (caregiver).

Your chemo is given to you in a bag, a pump and a leak-proof clear plastic bag. Your nurse will give you a spill kit with the following items:

- Two pairs of nitrile gloves (latex powder-free gloves). If you are allergic to latex, use latex-free gloves.
- Mask
- Gown
- One large chemo waste bag with tie
- One small chemo waste bag

If your infusion lasts through the night, you will need:

- Disposable rags or paper towels
- A plastic-backed mattress pad

### Storage

- Keep chemo medicines and equipment (such as needles, syringes, IV bags and IV tubing) in a safe place, out of the reach of children and pets.
- If refrigeration is needed, store the chemo in a separate leak-proof container away from food or put it in a crisper bin with no other items. Do not store food in areas near or below the chemo. Do not place the chemo in or near the freezer.
- Label containers with chemo to point out that they are dangerous.

- Do not store chemo infusions in the bathroom (too much moisture).
- Do not store in areas with temperatures that are very hot or very cold.
- Check infusion containers for damage or leaks. Do not open or use any damaged products.
- Return any damaged product to the hospital in a leak-proof, sealed container such as a plastic bag or a container with a lid.

## Handling Chemotherapy Infusions

- Only adults should handle chemo infusions or the bodily waste of people who are receiving chemotherapy. Pregnant women or children should not handle chemo or bodily waste at any time.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water before and after you handle chemo infusions or containers that the chemo comes in.
- Caregivers should wear disposable gloves when handling any type of chemo medicine.
  - Never use torn gloves or gloves with small holes in them.
- Remove the used gloves and place them in the leak-proof bags. Wash your hands after you remove the gloves.

## Disposal of Used Chemotherapy

### **If you have not been shown how to stop the infusion and disconnect the tubing:**

When the infusion is done, clamp the tubing and go to the Ambulatory Treatment Center (ATC). The nurses will disconnect tubing, flush lines and dispose of used equipment.

### **If you have been shown how to stop the infusion,** follow the pump instructions you received.

To dispose of the used equipment, follow these steps:

1. Wash your hands and put on 2 pairs of clean, disposable gloves, one on top of the other.
2. Disconnect the IV tubing from the catheter. Place the end of the IV tubing in the palm of your gloved hand.
3. Pull the outer glove over the tubing. This prevents any chemo from dripping out the end of the tube. You still have a pair of gloves on.
4. Gather all the used tubing, IV bag and pump. Place in a zip-lock bag. You may use the bag that the chemo came in. Remove and throw away the second pair of gloves in the bag. Close the bag. Wash your hands.
5. Bring the zip-lock bag of used equipment back to the ATC on your next visit.

## Handling a Chemotherapy Spill at Home

Intravenous or injectable chemo medicines may be accidentally spilled or splashed. The IV tubing may also become loose or disconnected or an IV bag may leak. If this happens, carefully clean up the spill. Follow these instructions:

- Do not touch the spill with your bare hands.
- Keep other people and pets away from the spill area.
- Remember pregnant women and children do not clean spills.
- Get your spill kit.
- Put on a pair of gloves.
- Put on the gown.

- Put on a second pair of gloves, covering the cuff of the gown.
- Put on the mask.
- Turn off the pump and clamp the catheter.
- If you have a central venous catheter or implantable access system (Port-a-Cath) in place, disconnect the catheter from the IV tubing before cleaning the spill. Clean the catheter and cap it according to the way you were taught.
- Put your chemo infusion pump and chemo bag in the clear leak proof bag and seal the bag.
- Use disposable rags or paper towels to absorb as much of the spilled chemo as possible.
- Put used clean-up materials directly into the small chemo waste bag and seal it. Place this in the large chemotherapy waste bag.
- While still wearing gloves, wash the area covered by the spill 3 times with soap and warm water. Use disposable rags or paper towels. Put them in the large chemo waste bag with other waste.
  - Do not use a mop to clean up the spill.
  - Put all contaminated materials (including gloves and gown), into the large chemo waste bag and tie the bag.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- If the spill occurs on sheets or clothing, wash the items in hot water, separate from other laundry.
- If chemotherapy gets on your skin, remove any wet clothing and wash the skin area with soap and water. If your skin stays red for more than 1 hour or becomes irritated, call your doctor.
- If chemotherapy splashes in your eye, flush the eye with large amounts of water for 15 minutes, then go to the nearest hospital emergency center.
- Patients on 24 hour or longer infusion should use a plastic-backed mattress pad to protect the mattress from a chemo spill.

Call the ATC during open hours to report the spill (see list below for centers and their open hours). Bring the large chemo waste bag and the clear plastic bag with the chemo and the infusion pump back to the ATC as soon as possible. A nurse will evaluate the spill and dispose of contaminated materials. Plans will be made to replace the spilled chemo so the treatment can be completed.

If you plan to be out-of-state during infusions, ask your nurse for special arrangements in case of a spill.

## Who to Call

If you have any questions about your **pump or your chemo medicine**, call the Ambulatory Treatment Center (ATC) at 713-792-2310 or 713-792-2312.

If you have any questions about your **intravenous catheter**, call the Vascular Access and Procedures Center.

## Ambulatory Treatment Centers (ATC)

<b>ATC Main R2:</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, Elevator C  Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.  Weekends and holidays 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. 713-792-2310	<b>ATC Main TU:</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor, Elevator A  Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. 713-794-1490	<b>ATC Main R10:</b> 10 <sup>th</sup> floor, elevator C  Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Saturday 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. 713-792-4732	<b>ATC Mays ACB:</b> 8 <sup>th</sup> floor, elevator T  Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. 713-745-1000
<b>MD Anderson League City</b> Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. 713-563-0670	<b>MD Anderson Sugar Land</b> Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. 281-566-1900	<b>MD Anderson West Houston</b> Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. 713-563-9600	<b>MD Anderson Woodlands</b> Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. 713-563-0050

## Vascular Access and Procedures Centers

### Main Building

Floor 8, near Elevator C  
 Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
 Saturday, Sunday and holidays, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
 713-792-2316

### Mays Clinic

Floor 8, near Elevator U  
 Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
 713-563-7277

For questions after usual working hours, call the page operator at 713-792-7090 and ask to speak to the charge nurse in the Vascular Access and Procedures Center.

## Resource

American Cancer Society:

<https://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html>