

Safe Handling of Chemotherapy at Home

Taking Chemotherapy by Mouth

You are receiving chemotherapy (chemo) as a pill to treat your cancer. You will take it at home. Follow these instructions to handle chemo during treatment and for **48 hours** after you take your last pill. If you follow these precautions, the people you live with and your surroundings are safer from the medicine.

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

Supplies

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

- Latex powder-free gloves for caregivers
 - If allergic to latex, use latex-free (nitrile) gloves
- Leak-proof plastic bags or disposable container with lid

Storage

- Keep chemo pills in a safe place, out of the reach of children and pets.
- Leave the chemo in the provided packaging until it is ready to be taken.
- Label all containers.
- Follow your health care team's instructions on how to store the pills.
- If refrigeration is needed, store the chemo pills in a separate, leak-proof container. Place the container away from food. **Do not** put the medicine in or near the freezer.
- **Do not** store these pills in the bathroom (too much moisture). **Do not** store in areas with temperatures that are very hot or very cold.

Handling Chemotherapy Pills

- Do not crush, break or chew the pills. Swallow them whole.
- Only adults should handle chemo pills.
- Pregnant women and children should not handle chemo or body waste at any time.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water before and after handling chemo pills.
- 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.

Handling Body Waste

- Follow safe handling guidelines during your chemo treatment and 48 hours after your last dose. This includes touching toilets, bedside commodes, bedpans, vomit pans, urinals, ostomy bags or other body waste containers.
- Use the toilet as usual. When you are done, close the toilet lid and flush (2 times if a low-flow toilet) to ensure all waste has been emptied.
- Try to avoid splashing urine. If the toilet or toilet seat becomes soiled with urine, stool or vomit, clean the surfaces well before other people use the toilet.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water after you use the toilet.
- Keep toilets and restrooms clean.
- Change and wash all soiled clothes or bed linens right away. Wash your skin with soap and water. If you use diapers or bladder control products, use the disposable type. Place soiled items inside 2 sealable, leak-proof plastic bags for disposal. This is called “double-bagging.”
- Empty body waste containers into the toilet. Pour close to the water to prevent splashing. Clean body waste containers after each use with soap and water. Rinse well.
- Clean ostomy bags once a day and empty as needed.
- Caregivers should wear disposable gloves when they handle or clean any type of bodily waste from the patient.
 - 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.

Handling Laundry

Wash your clothes or bed linens as usual unless they become soiled with chemo or body waste. Wash soiled laundry **separately** from other laundry items. Follow these instructions:

- Wash soiled laundry right away. If it cannot be washed right away, put it in a plastic bag. Wash it as soon as possible.
- Carry the soiled laundry away from your body. Wash your hands.
- Use detergent and hot or warm water.
- Caregivers should wear disposable gloves when handling laundry soiled by bodily waste from the patient.
 - 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.

Handling Trash

- Use a leak-proof plastic bag or container with a lid for soiled trash.
- Seal the bag and place it inside a larger leak-proof bag. Seal bags with ties or rubber bands when full. Seal containers with tape. Place in household trash.

- Label the bag “not for recycle.”
- Keep trash away from children and pets.

Sexual Activity

- If you are sexually active and of childbearing age use birth control during treatment. Your health care team can help you decide what kind is best for you.
- Most patients are able to continue sexual activity during chemo, but special precautions are sometimes needed. Traces of chemo may be present in vaginal fluid and semen for up to 48 hours after you finish treatment. Ask your health care team if you or your partner should use a condom or take other precautions.

Disposal of the Pills (Take Back Programs)

- MD Anderson is an authorized collection location. There are 2 locations, with green disposal bins, where you can drop off medicine (this includes controlled substances such as hydrocodone, morphine, tramadol, etc.):
 - Floor 2 Pharmacy: Main Building, Floor 2, near Elevator C
 - Mays Clinic Pharmacy: Mays Clinic, Floor 2, near The Tree Sculpture
- If you are on a clinical trial, **do not use** these bins. Return all medicines to your research nurse or clinical study coordinator.
- To dispose of oral chemotherapy, call your local city or county government’s household trash and recycling service. Ask if a drug take-back program is offered in your community.
- Some counties have hazardous waste collection days. On these days, prescription medicines are accepted at a central location for proper disposal.
- Information for local take back programs can be found at <https://takebackday.dea.gov/>

Resources

From the American Cancer Society:

<http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/treatmenttypes/chemotherapy/oral-chemotherapy>