

Hazardous Drugs and Safety in the Home

Patient and Family Information Sheet

This handout is for patients, family members, and caregivers. This handout explains how to avoid exposing others to hazardous (harmful or dangerous) drugs and how to safely handle hazardous drug waste in your home.

Some drugs are hazardous and can be harmful to people who do not need them. You must take special precautions to help prevent the hazardous drugs from touching others by mistake. Regardless of how you take your hazardous drug (pill, intravenous, injection), it can be found in your bodily fluids for **7** days after each treatment. Bodily fluids include: urine, stool, blood, semen, and vaginal fluid.

It is important that you and your caregivers safely handle any body fluids for 7 days after each treatment. If you are taking a hazardous drug every day by mouth: safety precautions are needed the entire time.

How should hazardous drugs be handled?

- Caregivers and family members must wear protective gloves when touching any hazardous drugs. You can use rubber gloves or medical exam gloves.
 - Rubber gloves may be cleaned with soap and water and reused.
 - Medical exam gloves should be thrown out after use.
- Always wash hands with soap and water after taking off gloves.
- All hazardous drugs must be stored out of reach of children and pets. Do not keep these drugs in the bathroom. High moisture (water in the air) may damage the drugs.
- Check labels to see if the drug should be kept in the fridge or away from light.
- Hazardous drugs that are not used should be returned to a pharmacy for throwing away.

Cancer Centre of
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Hazardous drug pills or tablets

- You (patient) can touch your own pills without wearing gloves but need to wash your hands with soap and water afterwards.
- If the pills or tablets are difficult to swallow, ask a pharmacist for advice.
- Tablets should **not** be broken, crushed, or chewed.
- Capsules should not be opened except when instructed to do so by a pharmacist.

Infusion Pump

- Your treatment nurse will explain how to monitor the pump and what to watch for.
- If the medication in the pump leaks out:
 1. Stop the leak with the clamp that was given to you by your nurse.
 2. Call your homecare nurse.
 3. Clean up the spill: see section *How to clean up spilled hazardous drugs* on page 5.

General disposal of body fluids and supplies

- Patients, family members, and caregivers should wear protective gloves when handling linens, supplies, devices and equipment soiled with the patient's body fluids or with spilled hazardous drugs.
- You can use rubber gloves or medical exam gloves.
 - Rubber gloves may be cleaned with soap and water and reused.
 - Medical exam gloves should be thrown out after use.
- Body fluids (urine, vomit, feces) can be flushed down the toilet. Close the lid and flush twice.
- Some disposable items cannot be flushed down the toilet (this includes your medical exam gloves): place them in a plastic bag, sealed or tied tightly after use. Put the plastic bag into a second garbage bag, tie it tightly, and then put it in your regular garbage.
- Keep your garbage away from small children and pets.
- Remove protective gloves and wash your hands with soap and water.

What should I do when I go to the bathroom?

- You should sit down to pee to reduce splashing.
- You should flush the toilet twice after use, with the lid down.
- Sharing the bathroom with your family is safe as long as all urine and stool are cleaned from the toilet.
- Septic and sewer systems are not affected.
- Wash your hands well with soap and water afterward, and wash your skin if urine or stool gets on it.
- If you use a bedpan, urinal or commode, wear gloves when cleaning or emptying containers. Wash the containers daily with soap and water.

What should I do if I do not have control of my bladder or bowel?

- Wear absorbent underwear; use a disposable plastic backed pad/liner on the bed or resting area.
- Change your soiled clothes right away and wash your skin with soap and water.
- Used disposable items should be sealed and double bagged for disposal (*see General Disposal section on page 2*).
- Place a plastic sheet under the bed sheet to cover and protect your mattress.

What if I become sick and vomit?

- Keep a plastic container (ice cream bucket) close by if you are feeling sick.
- Wear gloves when cleaning vomit and emptying the bucket.
- Rinse the bucket with hot soapy water and rinse; empty the water into the toilet, then close the lid and flush twice. Dry the containers with disposable towels.
- Used disposable items should be sealed and double bagged for disposal (*see General Disposal section on page 2*).

What should I do with my laundry?

- Wash your clothing and bed linen as you normally would **unless** they become soiled with the hazardous drug or bodily fluids (urine, vomit, stool, semen or vaginal fluid).
- Wear protective gloves to handle the clothes or linens that are soiled.
- Wash the soiled clothing, sheets, and towels twice. First wash separately from other laundry in the washing machine, using hot water and regular laundry soap, then wash a second time.
- Do not wash soiled laundry with regular laundry.
- If soiled linens or clothes are not washed right away, place them in a plastic bag and tie the bag closed until they can be washed.

What should I do if hazardous drugs or body fluids get into my eyes or on my skin?

- Eyes: rinse the eyes gently with water for 15 minutes and call your cancer doctor.
- Skin: wash the area with soap and water, repeat at least once. If irritation or redness lasts longer than 1 hour, call your cancer doctor.

Is it safe to have sex during my treatment?

- Most forms of sexual activity while on hazardous drugs are considered safe. However, there may be a small amount of hazardous drugs in your body fluids (including vaginal secretions and semen) for up to **7** days.
- For this reason, we recommend the following for 7 days after each treatment:
 - During sex with penetration (vaginal or anal), wear a condom.
 - During oral sex, wear a condom or dental dam. Avoid swallowing vaginal secretions or semen.
 - Kissing (even “french kissing”) is considered safe. The amount of cancer drug exchanged in your saliva is very small.

Eating together, enjoying your favorite activities, and hugging are all safe for you to do. You can still be around small children and pets.

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Special considerations for family members and caregivers of children receiving hazardous drugs

- Use disposable diapers rather than cloth diapers. Remember to use gloves for diaper changes.
- Wash genitals with mild soap and water and use a moisture barrier cream with each diaper change.

How do I clean up spilled hazardous drugs or body fluids during the special handling period?

- Clean up as soon as possible to avoid the fluids spreading to other areas:
 - Wear two pairs of protective disposable gloves. Do not touch the spill with unprotected hands.
 - Use disposable absorbent supplies (paper towels) to soak/wipe up as much of the spill as possible then:
 - Clean surfaces using disposable cloths soaked in soapy water (dish soap).
 - Rinse the area with water and clean with a new disposable cloth.
- Place the used disposable items in a plastic bag, sealed or tied tightly after use. Put the plastic bag into a second garbage bag, tie it tightly, and then put it in your regular garbage.
- Wash non disposable items and surfaces that have come into contact with spilled cancer drug or body fluids with hot soapy water and rinse. Dry with disposable paper towels.
- Remove protective gloves and wash hands with soap and water when tasks are completed.

Please tell healthcare personnel at appointments and tests that you have received a hazardous drug and when the last dose was.