

How to be safe during chemotherapy

What is chemotherapy (chemo)?

Chemotherapy (chemo) is any medicine that is used to treat cancer and immune system disorders like lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease.

- Because it kills any cells that rapidly divide, it can also harm normal cells.
- Healthy people should avoid contact with chemo and chemo waste as much as possible.

What should I know about chemo safety during hospital stays?

- Your child's nurse will wear special protective items, such as a mask, gown and gloves, to keep themselves safe from chemo. Remember – your care team will give chemo to many patients over many years. They need to take extra precautions to help keep them safe in the hospital.
- Special precautions must be used at all times when your child is getting chemo.
 - This includes anytime you handle your child's chemo medicine, including intravenous (I.V.), by mouth (oral, to swallow) and injection (shot) forms.
 - This also includes handling your child's urine, stool and vomit (throw up) during chemo up to 7 days after stopping chemo in the hospital.
- Your child should always use their patient room bathroom or designated bathroom in clinic.
- Always use gloves when cleaning up your child's urine, stool or vomit. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water when finished.
 - Place an absorbent pad over the toilet before flushing your child's urine, stool or vomit.
 - Place the dirty pad in its own ziplock bag and then into a yellow chemo bag. Your child's nurse will dispose of the yellow chemo bag into the yellow chemo bin.
 - If your child wears diapers, place each dirty diaper in its own ziplock bag. Your child's nurse will place each bag in a yellow chemo bag or bin.
 - Please let the nurse know if you do not have absorbent pads or bags in your bathroom.
- Wash reusable plastic items, like emesis basins and bedpans, every day with hospital approved disinfectant wipes.
- Please talk with your child's nurse before leaving the unit.
- Call the nurse **right away** if you notice your child's chemo leaking or spilled. Keep people away from the spill until cleaned up.

What special steps should I take when I handle my child's chemo at home?

To keep yourself and your family safe, follow the guidelines listed on the next page.

NOTE: Pregnant caregivers should not mix or handle chemo without special protective items, like mask and gloves, and proper education.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

How to be safe during chemotherapy, continued

Prepare yourself and your work area

- Choose 1 area in your house to prepare and give chemo.
- Prepare your child's chemo in a clean area.
- Remove any clutter or other items.
- Clean the area well with soap and water.

Prepare the chemo

- Always wear gloves when you handle your child's chemo.
- **Do not crush tablets or open capsules without advice from your child's care team.**
- If you are allowed to crush tablets or open capsules, always wear a mask when you do so.

Store the medicine and clean up

- Store your child's chemo away from children and pets.
- When done, clean your work area with soap and water.
- Throw away any disposable items like your gloves, paper towels or tissues in a ziplock bag, a tied plastic grocery bag or a tied plastic trash bag.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Never flush unused chemo in the toilet. Bring unused chemo back to the clinic for proper disposal, or follow Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines for disposing medicines at home.

What special steps should I take when I handle my child's urine, stool and vomit at home?

Guidelines for cleaning up urine, stool and vomit at home for up to **2 days after your child finishes chemo** are listed below.

NOTE: Pregnant caregivers should not handle chemo waste without special protective items, like mask and gloves. Always keep chemo waste away from children and pets.

Clean up urine, stool or vomit

- Wear gloves to clean up your child's urine, stool or vomit.
 - Close the lid on the toilet before flushing to prevent it from spraying onto the seat or floor. Flush the toilet 2 times after each use at home.
 - Clean the toilet seat right away with soap and water if there is urine or stool on it.
- Wear gloves to change your child's diaper. Place each diaper in a ziplock bag or a tied plastic grocery bag.
- Throw away any disposable items like your gloves, paper towels or tissues in a ziplock bag, a tied plastic grocery bag or a tied plastic trash bag.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.

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How to be safe during chemotherapy, continued

Clean items that have urine, stool or vomit on them

- Wear gloves to handle all items dirty with urine, stool or vomit.
- Carry dirty items away from your body.
- Wash any dirty items **right away** in a washing machine with warm or hot water. This includes things like blankets, stuffed animals and clothes.
- Keep dirty items separate from your normal laundry.
- For items that you cannot wash, such as carpet, furniture or a mattress, spot clean them with soap and water **right away**. If your child wets the bed often, you may want to cover the mattress and pillows with plastic covers.
- Throw away any disposable items like your gloves, paper towels or tissues in a ziplock bag, a tied plastic grocery bag or a tied plastic trash bag.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.

What should I do if I spill my child's chemo at home?

- Remove all people and pets away from the area **right away**.
- Wear gloves and a mask, and wipe up the spill with a wet paper towel.
- Clean the area well with soap and water. Then, clean the area again.
- Throw away any disposable items like your gloves, paper towels or tissues in a ziplock bag, a tied plastic grocery bag or a tied plastic trash bag.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Call your local waste management company for advice on how to dispose of hazardous waste.

What if chemo spills on my clothes or skin at home?

- Wear gloves to remove your clothes **right away**.
- Wash your skin **right away** with soap and water for 15 minutes.
- Wash your dirty clothes separate from your normal laundry.
- Throw away your gloves, and wash your hands with soap and water.

What if chemo splashes in my eyes at home?

- Flush your eyes **right away** with large amounts of room-temperature water for 15 minutes.
- Call the Georgia Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 for follow-up treatment.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Fever higher than 100.5°F or as advised by the doctor
- Excessive nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- New cough or rash

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

How to be safe during chemotherapy, continued

Also call if you have questions or concerns about your child's medicines.

When should I call 911?

Call 911 **right away** if your child has any of these:

- Will not wake up or is very sleepy
- Has trouble breathing or blue lips
- Has a seizure

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.