Chemotherapy Safety

Chemotherapy drugs are given to destroy cancer cells. But they can also affect normal cells. Being exposed to small amounts of chemotherapy drugs over a long time may damage normal cells in people who do not have cancer. Health care workers use protective equipment when they give chemotherapy drugs. We know very little about the possible harm to people who care for patients receiving chemotherapy in their homes. Always avoid unnecessary exposure.

**General safety guidelines**
Be sure to take your medications as scheduled.
1. Wash your hands well with soap and water.
2. Gather chemotherapy medicine containers.
3. Remove the plastic cover from the medicine container.
4. Pour out the prescribed number of pills into the plastic cover or use a medication cup or other small container. Use the cup only for medicines. Do not touch the medicine.
5. Do not crush pills.
6. Take or give the medicine as directed.
7. Replace the cap on the medicine container.
8. Store all medicine containers in a dry place that is out of the reach of children.
9. Wash hands with soap and water.

**Special precautions you should take for 48 hours after chemotherapy**
1. Your family must wear gloves to handle your blood, sputum, vomit, urine, stool or contaminated articles (towels, linens, etc.). If they do come in contact with any of these, they should wash well with soap and water.
2. If you get blood, sputum, vomit, urine or stool on your clothes or linens, wash the clothes separately from other laundry.
3. Ensure that anyone who is pregnant does not come in contact with your blood, sputum, vomit, urine or stool.
4. Wear a condom during sexual intercourse.
5. Flush the toilet once with the lid down.
6. Tell your dentist that you had chemotherapy.
7. Being with the ones you love is important. Hugging and kissing, eating together, sharing favorite activities are all safe.

**Medication spills**
If you are receiving home intravenous chemotherapy, keep a spill kit in your home.
1. Put on gloves.
2. Use paper towels to pick up or wipe spilled medicine. Place spilled medicine, gloves and paper towels in a plastic bag.
3. Wash the area with clean paper towels and soap and water.
4. Rinse and dry the area well.
5. Place the gloves and paper towels in the plastic bag.
6. Seal the bag tightly. Return the bag to the health care agency providing the home chemotherapy.
7. Wash your hands with soap and water.

If you spill medicine on your skin, wash right away with soap and water.

If you spill medicine in your eyes, rinse out eye with fast-running lukewarm water for five minutes. Keep affected eye open while rinsing. Then call the regional poison control center for your area. (An eye exam may be needed after any spill in the eyes.)

**Disposal of medicines and supplies**
1. Return all unused medicines and supplies to the health care agency providing the home chemotherapy.
2. Do not remove needles from syringes.
3. Return all supplies used to give chemotherapy in a sealed container. The container should be puncture-proof and leak-proof (like a coffee can or plastic milk container).

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.