Home Safety for Patients Receiving Anti-Cancer Medications

You may notice that your nurse wears protective equipment (gloves, gown, etc.) when administering your chemo or biotherapy to protect him or herself from being exposed to the medications. You, your caregivers and family members must also protect yourselves against exposure. This handout will review how to safely handle anti-cancer medicines and your body waste when at home.

What are anti-cancer medications?

Anti-cancer medications can include chemotherapy (given by IV, by mouth, or another route), biotherapy, targeted therapy, and hormone therapy. Though this article refers to them as anti-cancer medications, these medications may be used to treat conditions other than cancer.

Handling Body Waste

Many anti-cancer medications are released from the body through urine, stool, vomit, and blood for 48 hours after your treatment has stopped. The guidelines listed below should be followed during that time:

- After using the toilet, close the lid and flush twice. Men should urinate sitting down to avoid splashing.
- After using the toilet, wash your hands well with soap and water. If any fluids splashed on your skin, clean the area with soap and water.
- Wear gloves when cleaning the toilet or cleaning up any urine, stool, or vomit, or changing diapers/incontinence pads. Wash your hands with the gloves on, then remove the gloves, dispose of them in the trash, and wash your hands again.
- If using a bedpan or urinal, wear gloves and dump contents into the toilet close to the water to limit splashing. While wearing the gloves, wash the container with soap and water after each use.
- Diapers can be disposed of in the regular trash.
- If you have an ostomy, wear gloves when emptying and wash the collection bag once a day with soap and water.

Handling Trash or Laundry

When handling trash or laundry that has come in contact with anti-cancer medications or body fluids within 48 hours after treatment:

- Wear gloves to handle contaminated trash or laundry. Wash your hands before and after removing the gloves.
- Contaminated trash can be placed in special bags if you were supplied with these or doubled bagged in plastic, leak-proof bags and placed in your regular trash.
- If possible, wash contaminated laundry right away. If you cannot wash it right away, place it in a leak-proof plastic bag and wash it as soon as possible.
- Wash contaminated laundry separate from other laundry, using regular laundry detergent and warm or hot water.

Handling Spills

If anti-cancer medications or body fluids are spilled or splashed within 48 hours after treatment:

- Wear gloves to clean up the spill/splash.
- Wipe up the spill with paper towels.
- Clean the area with soap and water and rinse using paper towels.
- Dispose of trash in specially marked containers (if you were provided with them) or double bag in leak-proof plastic bags.
- Wash hands before and after removing gloves.

**Sexual Contact**

Anti-cancer medications can also be excreted in body fluids, such as semen and vaginal fluid. To prevent exposure of your partner to these fluids:

- Use condoms during oral sex and intercourse for 48 hours after treatment. This applies to both the person receiving chemotherapy and their partner.
- Effective birth control should be used throughout treatment to prevent pregnancy while on these medications and for several months or years after therapy, depending on the medication. Anti-cancer medications can have harmful side effects to the fetus, especially in the first trimester. In addition, menstrual cycles can become irregular during and after treatment, so you may not know if you are at a time in your cycle when you could become pregnant or if you are actually pregnant.

**Safety for My Family**

- Hugging and kissing are safe for you and your partner or family members.
- You can visit, sit with, hug, and kiss the children in your life.
- You can be around pregnant women, though (if possible) they should not clean up any of your body fluids after you have treatment.
- You can share a bathroom with others. If body fluids splash on the toilet, wear gloves, and clean the area with soap and water before others use the toilet.

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