

How to Safely Handle Cancer Medications and Body Fluids at Home

This information is for people receiving cancer medication at home, their family members and caregivers. It is meant to help support you through your cancer treatment and answer some of your questions. Use this information together with the Ontario Health (Cancer Care Ontario) Medication Patient Information Sheets for your specific drug or regimen.

In this handout, you will learn:

The importance of handling medication and body fluids safely

How to safely take oral cancer medication at home

How to store cancer medication at home

How to safely throw away cancer medication, sharps (needles or syringes) and items with body fluids

Safety rules for body fluids at home

What to do if cancer medication gets on your skin or in your eyes

It is important to handle medication and body fluids safely

Some cancer medications are strong drugs that help kill the cancer cells in your body. When you take cancer medications, small amounts of the medication can be found in your body fluids (such as urine (pee), blood, and sweat).

Your family and caregivers can be exposed to small amounts of medication by touching your medications and body fluids. The risk of harm to them is low but they need to follow special rules for handling your medication and body fluids.

Children, pregnant people and people who are breastfeeding should not touch the medication or your body fluids at all.



Here are some general safety tips for your caregivers:

- Make sure you have a supply of nitrile or latex gloves at home. You can buy them at your local pharmacy or grocery store.
- Limit the number of people who touch your cancer medication and body fluids.
- Caregivers should always wear gloves when handling things that may be soiled with body fluids – such as urinals, pails, bedpans and basins – and when changing disposable undergarments.

How to safely take oral cancer medication at home

Follow these instructions for your oral cancer medication

If you are the person taking the medication:

- Check to make sure your medication package arrives on time and that the medication is not damaged.
- Wash your hands before and after touching your oral cancer medication.
- Swallow each pill whole. Do not crush or chew your pills.

If you are a caregiver:

- Always wear gloves when touching tablets, capsules or liquids.
- Wash your hands before putting on your gloves and after taking them off, even if your skin did not touch the oral cancer medication.
- Throw out your gloves after each use. Do not re-use gloves.
- Do not touch oral cancer medications at all if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

How to store cancer medication at home

Store your medication:

- in the original packaging provided by your pharmacist
- in a dry place
- away from heat and light
- out of sight and reach of children and pets

Medications may be stored at room temperature or in the refrigerator. Follow the storage directions from your pharmacist.

How to safely throw away cancer medication, sharps (needles or syringes) and items with body fluids

Medications

- Follow your health care team's directions to safely dispose of your cancer medications.
- Do not flush cancer medications down the toilet or put them in your regular garbage.

Sharps

- Put any used sharps such as needles or syringes in the special container given to you by your health care team.
- Ask your health care team what to do with the sharps container once your treatment is over or the container is full. Do not throw the sharps container in with your regular garbage.

Items soiled with body fluids or cancer medication

Things that may become soiled with your body fluids or cancer medication include:

- dressings
 - disposable undergarments
 - bandages
 - ostomy supplies
 - plastic sheets or pads
 - paper towels
 - gloves
- Wear gloves when handling soiled items.
 - Put soiled items in a plastic garbage bag, including your gloves. Tie the bag tightly and put it inside a second plastic garbage bag. Tie the second bag tightly and throw it out with your regular garbage.

Safety rules for body fluids at home

Your body fluids have small amounts of cancer medication in them. You need to follow special rules to protect your family and caregivers from the medication. Some examples of body fluids that may contain very small amounts of cancer medication include:

- bowel movements (poo)
- urine (pee)
- blood
- phlegm or mucous
- saliva
- vomit (throw up)
- semen
- vaginal fluid
- sweat

Your health care team will tell you how long you and your caregivers should follow special handling rules for body fluids. You can use the following times as a guide:

- After a single treatment of cancer medication follow these rules for 48 hours (two days).
- If you take your cancer medication every day, follow these rules the whole time, until 48 hours (two days) after you stop taking the medication.

Intimacy and Sex

It is safe to eat together, enjoy favorite activities, and hug and kiss your loved ones (including children) while taking cancer medications. However, during your cancer treatment you and your sexual partner may have to do things differently or not have sex for a short period of time.

Talk to your health care team about:

- how your treatment may affect your sexual health
- birth control, if there is any chance of pregnancy happening

Going to the bathroom

- Everyone should sit down to pee.
- Put the lid down before you flush the toilet. You only need to flush once.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- If there are any splashes or spills on or around the toilet, wear gloves to clean the area. Use soapy water or a bleach solution and paper towels.
- You can share the same toilet and bathroom as others if you make sure that any splashes or spills are cleaned up.

Throwing up

- Keep a plastic pail nearby if you think that you are going to throw up.
- Flush any vomit down the toilet.
- Wear gloves and wash the pail out with soapy water after using it. Dry with paper towels.

Laundry and dishes

- Clothing, sheets and towels that have been soiled with body fluids should be handled with gloves. Wash them using hot water and regular laundry detergent.
- If you do not have a washer, place soiled items in a double plastic bag until they can be washed.
- Wash your dishes the normal way – you do not have to wash them separately or do anything special.

Losing bladder (pee) or bowel (poo) control

This is what you should do if you have trouble holding in your urine (pee) or bowel movements (poo):

- Wear disposable underwear.
- Put a disposable plastic sheet, large garbage bag or disposable plastic-backed pad under your bed sheet to protect the mattress.
- Protect your couch, other cushions, car seats or carpeting by wearing disposable undergarments and by sitting on a disposable plastic sheet with a towel over it.

