

Safe handling of chemotherapy medicines

An information guide for parents, carers and young adult patients

The purpose of this guide is to give information on the safe handling and storage of chemotherapy medicines, and safe disposal of bodily waste at home.

Please read this guide carefully alongside any patient information provided by the manufacturer. Keep it somewhere safe so you can read it again.

What is chemotherapy medicine?

Chemotherapy medicine is toxic to cells. It is used to kill or damage cancer cells but it can also damage healthy cells, so safe handling is needed to minimise the risk.

How should chemotherapy medicine be stored?

Keep all medication out of reach and sight of children. If storage in a fridge is recommended on the label, place the medicine in a hard plastic container on the bottom shelf of the fridge away from other foodstuffs. Medicines that need to be stored at room temperature should be kept in a cupboard out of reach of children.

What precautions are needed?

Always handle chemotherapy medicine with care. Wear a pair of non-sterile disposable gloves when handling or giving any chemotherapy medicine. Do not touch the tablets, capsules or liquid directly with your hands. When handling tablets do not crush or break in half. Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after giving the chemotherapy medicine or handling any spillage. Please read the specific patient information leaflet for each drug for any further safe handling advice.

If the oral chemotherapy medicine looks different from your usual prescription, do not use it. Contact your medical team for advice.

If you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant, or are breastfeeding, avoid handling chemotherapy medicine if at all possible. Please discuss safety with your nurse or pharmacist.

What to do if medicine is spilled?

Always wear non-sterile disposable gloves and clean up a spillage immediately, following the instructions below:

Spillage on the skin

- put on the gloves
- wash the affected area immediately with plenty of soap and water
- contact your hospital team for advice if the skin becomes sore

Spillage in the eye(s)

- put on the gloves
- wash the eye(s) immediately with plenty of water for at least 10 minutes
- contact your hospital team for advice if, after washing, the eye(s) remain sore

Spillage on a work surface or floor

- put on the gloves
- cover the spillage with paper towels
- wipe clean with water and then with soap and water
- double bag paper towels, gloves and all items used for cleaning and dispose of with household waste

Spillage onto clothing or bedding

- put on the gloves
- blot the area dry with paper towels
- machine wash the soiled items twice at the highest temperature the washing instructions allow (minimum 60 degrees) – do not remove from the drum after the first wash and wash separately to other items
- double bag paper towels, gloves and all items used for cleaning and dispose of with household waste

How to dispose of bodily fluids?

Chemotherapy medicines are passed out of the body in wee, poo and vomit. The time taken for medicine to pass out of the body can be as long as 7 days.

Wear non-sterile disposable gloves when handling wee, poo, vomit, soiled items and nappies for 7 days after chemotherapy. Flush the toilet twice with the lid down. Double bag and place nappies in household waste.

Machine wash soiled items twice at the highest temperature the washing instructions allow (minimum 60 degrees). Do not remove washing from the drum after the first wash. Wash separately to other items.

How to dispose of expired, unused or part used medicines?

In some cases, such as when treatment is part of a clinical trial, all medicines, including empty containers, must be returned to your hospital. Ask the pharmacist whether you need to return empty containers.

If you have not been asked to return chemotherapy medicines to the hospital, follow the instructions below:

- dispose of empty tablet bottles and boxes in household waste
- dispose of empty liquid bottles, syringes and medicine spoons in a chemotherapy 'sharps bin': when not in use, the sharps bin must be closed, but not sealed and stored out of reach of children – seal it and return to your hospital when it is two thirds full
- always return full or part-used bottles of chemotherapy liquid, tablets or injections to your hospital

If you have any questions or concerns about anything in this leaflet please contact your team.

Practical points to remember when giving or handling chemotherapy medicines:

- wash your hands thoroughly before and after
- wear non-sterile disposable gloves
- change gloves immediately if torn
- after use, double bag and dispose of gloves and all items used for cleaning with household waste
- apply barrier cream to protect skin from contaminated wee and poo during nappy changes



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CCLG and The Children & Young People's Cancer Association are operating names of The Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group, registered charity in England and Wales (1182637) and Scotland (SC049948).

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This edition: July 2026

Next review date: July 2029



This factsheet was reviewed by Rachel Greer, Paediatric Oncology Pharmacist, Leeds Children's Hospital on behalf of the CCLG Information Advisory Group, comprising parents, survivors and multiprofessional experts in the field of children and young people's cancer.

We are CCLG: The Children & Young People's Cancer Association, a charity dedicated to creating a brighter future for children and young people with cancer. Powered by expertise, we unite the children and young people's cancer community, driving collective action and progress.

We fund and lead pioneering research, provide trusted information and guidance for children and young people with cancer and their families, and bring together professionals to improve treatment, care and outcomes.

Our expert information helps children and young people, and everyone supporting them, to navigate the challenges of cancer and its impact, offering reassurance and clarity when it's needed most.

We make every effort to ensure that this information is accurate and up to date at the time of printing. Information in this publication should be used to supplement appropriate professional or other advice specific to your circumstances.

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