



Safety precautions for patients and their loved ones

There are many things you can do during and after chemotherapy to keep yourself and your loved ones from being affected by the drugs while your body is getting rid of them. It takes about 48 hours for your body to break down and/or get rid of most chemo drugs. Most of this comes out in your body fluids — urine, stool, tears, saliva, and vomit. The drugs are also found in your blood. When these drugs leave your body as waste, they can harm or irritate skin — even other people’s skin. Keep in mind that for this reason, toilets can be a hazard for children and pets and it is important to be careful. Talk to your doctor about these and any other precautions you should follow.

During and for 48 hours after you finish getting chemotherapy:

- Flush the toilet twice after you use it. Put the lid down before flushing to avoid splashing. If possible, you might want to use a separate toilet during this time.
- Both men and women should sit on the toilet to use it. This cuts down on splashing.
- Always wash your hands with warm water and soap after using the toilet. Use paper towels to dry your hands.

- If you vomit into the toilet, clean off all splashes and flush twice. If you vomit into a bucket or basin, carefully empty it into the toilet without splashing the contents and flush twice. Wash out the bucket with hot soapy water and rinse it, emptying the wash and rinse water into the toilet, then flushing it. Dry the bucket with paper towels and throw them away.
- Caregivers should wear throw-away waterproof gloves if they need to touch any of your body fluids. (These can be bought in most drug stores.) They should always wash their hands with warm water and soap afterward — even if they wore gloves.
- If a caregiver does come in contact with any of your body fluids they should wash the area very well with warm soap and water. Although this is not likely to cause any harm, try to take extra care to avoid this. At your next visit, let your doctor know this happened. Being exposed frequently may lead to problems.
- Use a condom during sex. The drugs can be found in semen and vaginal secretions.
- Drugs might also be found in saliva, so avoid deep kissing and sharing food or drinks with others. Use disposable straws for drinking. Clean flatware and dishes thoroughly with soap and warm water and rinse well before washing a second time with the other dishes.
- Any clothes or sheets that have body fluids on them should be washed in your washing machine — not by hand. Wash them twice in hot water with regular laundry detergent. Do not wash them with other clothes. If they cannot be washed right away seal them in a plastic bag.
- If using throw-away adult diapers, underwear, or sanitary pads, seal them in plastic and throw them away with your regular trash.

Adapted from The Cleveland Clinic Foundation. Chemotherapy Precautions During and After Treatment.

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