

# Chemotherapy and safety at home



Oncology/Hematology/BMT  
Department

4480 Oak Street, Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4  
604-875-2345 1-888-300-3088  
www.bcchildrens.ca

## Why is it important to handle chemotherapy safely?

**Chemotherapy** is a **cytotoxic** medicine. This means that it destroys cells. It is important to protect yourself and your family.

## How to store the medicine

Keep your child's chemotherapy medicine in a sealed plastic container.

Keep the container in a place that:

- children and pets cannot reach,
- is cool and dry, and
- is away from food.

Do not keep the medicine in the kitchen or the bathroom.

Return expired or unused medicine to the BC Children's Hospital Pharmacy.

## Get ready to prepare the medicine

**You will need these supplies:**

- Paper towels
- Rubber or disposable (throw away) gloves
- A pill crusher (if you need to crush pills)
- A pill cutter (if you need to cut pills)
- A mask (if you are crushing or cutting pills)
- Oral syringes or medicine cups (if mixing with liquid)

You can buy gloves, masks, medicine cups and syringes at most pharmacies.

**Wear disposable gloves or rubber gloves** when you handle chemotherapy.

**Wear a mask if:**

- You are splitting chemotherapy pills, or
- You are crushing chemotherapy pills

If you can, avoid contact with chemotherapy if you are:

- Pregnant, or could become pregnant, or
- Breastfeeding.

## Where to prepare chemotherapy

Choose a place away from windows, heat ducts, and places where you prepare food.

## Prepare and give the medicine

**If you are crushing or cutting pills:**

1. Cover the surface where you will prepare the medicine with a paper towel.
2. Put on gloves and a mask to protect you from powder and splashes.
3. Crush or cut the pill. Use a pill crusher or pill cutter from your pharmacy. Keep this pill crusher or pill cutter to use with your child's chemotherapy only.

**Do NOT** use the pill crusher or pill cutter for other medicines.

**Do NOT** use other tools, like a spoon or rolling pin, to crush or cut chemotherapy.

**Next, mix the medicine with food or liquid.**

**Mix with food:**

4. **For crushed pills:** Add a little bit of soft food to the powder in the pill crusher. Stir.

**For cut pills:** Add the cut pill to a spoonful of food.

5. Give your child the dose of medicine right after mixing.

**Mix with liquid (for crushed pills):**

4. Add a bit of liquid to the powder in the pill crusher.

5. Mix well so the medicine dissolves.

6. Draw up the medicine into a syringe.

7. Give your child the dose of medicine right after mixing.

**Do not refrigerate or store medicine after you mix it.**

## Clean up after giving chemotherapy

Any disposable (throw away) items that touch medicine or body waste should be double bagged before you put them in the garbage.

You can collect sealed plastic bags with used paper towels, gloves, and other items, in a larger plastic bag.

When the larger bag is full, put it in the garbage.

After your child takes their dose:

1. Seal paper towels in a plastic bag.
2. Clean the table surface and pill cutter or crusher with soapy water.
3. Wash reusable items, like syringes or medicine cups, with soapy water.
4. Remove your gloves.
  - If you used **disposable gloves**: Remove them by carefully turning them inside out. Seal them in a plastic bag. Throw the bag away.
  - If you used **rubber gloves**: Wash the outside with soapy water and then remove them.

After you remove your gloves, wash your hands with soap and water.

5. Remove your mask with clean hands. Do not touch the front of the mask.

### If the medicine gets on your skin

Wash the skin well with soap and water. Dry the skin. Watch the area for 7 days. Call your doctor if the area gets red or sore.

### If the medicine gets in your eye

Rinse the eye with tap water for 15 minutes or more. Call your doctor.

## Handle waste safely

Some of the chemotherapy medicine will leave your child's body in **waste** (pee, poo and vomit). **When your child is taking chemotherapy and for 48 hours after the last dose**, it is important to protect yourself and others from these chemotherapy by-products, or waste.

### You will need these supplies at home:

- Paper towels or toilet paper

- Rubber or disposable (throw away) gloves
- Sealed plastic bags, or zip-lock bags
- Soap and water
- A mask
- A bucket for vomit (or use a disposable container, like an ice cream bucket or coffee can)

### **Protect yourself and others:**

- If you can, choose one bathroom at home for your child to use. No one else should use this bathroom. Ask your child to close the lid when they flush the toilet.
- Keep your supplies ready for quick clean-up.
- Always wear gloves when you handle waste or soiled items. After you remove the gloves, wash your hands well with soap and water.
- Keep the vomit container close by for your child. Empty vomit into the toilet, and wash the container with soap and water.
- If your child may wet or soil the bed, protect the mattress with a plastic cover.
- If your child wears diapers:
  - Wear disposable gloves when you change their diaper.
  - Place diapers in a sealed plastic bag before you dispose of them.
  - Wash your hands with soap and water after every diaper change.

Avoid splashing or spilling pee, poo or vomit.

### **If you splash or spill waste or medicine:**

- Always wear gloves.
- Clean the spill up as soon as you can. Keep people and pets away from the spill until you finish cleaning.
- Put waste in the toilet. Close the lid. Then, flush.
- Clean up spills with toilet paper if you can. Then, flush toilet paper down the toilet. If you use paper towels, seal them in a plastic bag. Put the bag in the garbage.
- Clean the area with soapy water, and dry.

### **How to wash laundry**

- First, wash any laundry with waste on it. Any soiled linens, clothes, and other washables should go in the washing machine. Use hot soapy water.
- Wash a second time. You can wash items separately, or with regular laundry.
- If you cannot wash soiled laundry right away, put it in a sealed plastic bag.

**If you have questions about your child's chemotherapy, contact your nurse clinician or clinic nurse.**

<http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/HPI/DrugDatabase/Appendices/Appendix5/SafeDisposalofWasteatHomeAfterChemotherapyPtInfo.htm>



## Contacts

**Community Nurse:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Doctor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nurse Clinician / Hospital Nurse:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

At Children's & Women's Health Centre of British Columbia we believe parents are partners on the health care team. We want you to be as informed as possible.

This brochure will answer some of your questions. Please ask questions and share your concerns.

## **References:**

<https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/Article?contentid=999&language=English>

<http://www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/OncHemBMT/ForFamilies/Parentinformation.htm>

BC Cancer Agency. (2006). Cancer Drug Manual: Safe Disposal of Waste at Home after Chemotherapy (Appendix 5). Retrieved March 5, 2007 from: