When you or someone you care for is on chemotherapy
Disclaimer

This is general information developed by The Ottawa Hospital. It is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified healthcare provider. Please consult your own personal physician who will be able to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation.
Questions?
This booklet is provided for your information. If you have any further questions about precautions regarding your chemotherapy, please ask your clinic nurse, home visiting nurse or your Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) Case Manager.

Allan Boyd with nurse Elizabeth Barber, Monitoring his Chemo home infusion pump.

Chemotherapy drugs can provide benefit in treatment plans for cancer and for other conditions. These drugs are very powerful and some precautions are recommended during, and for a short time after chemotherapy is given. This is to ensure that people and the environment are protected from accidental exposure to the drugs. Accidental exposure can create a hazard for people and the surroundings.
What is hazardous waste?

Hazards are anything that will cause someone harm or something that can put someone in danger. This can include anything that is poisonous, flammable or can have a chemical reactivity.

Waste is any unwanted material or products that are no longer useful.

Hazardous waste is unwanted material or products that are no longer useful and may cause someone harm unless disposed of safely.

How does hazardous waste affect me, my family, and the people who care for me?

Repeated exposure to hazardous waste is not beneficial to the people who care for you. Studies have shown that their bodies can absorb hazardous waste and they may experience side effects.

People who are getting chemotherapy have medication in their bodies while they are receiving chemotherapy and also for another 48 hours after the medication is finished. This means that a person’s bodily waste (urine, stool, and vomit) is considered hazardous waste during treatment and for 48 hours after the medication is finished.
**How can I protect myself, my family and the people who care for me from hazardous waste?**

While you are getting your chemotherapy and for 48 hours after it is finished, you can protect yourself, your family and those who care for you in several ways. Some of the ways are listed below.

**How to protect your environment from contact or saturation with bodily wastes during this time**

**Things to Avoid:**

- Do not wear your favourite clothes.
- Do not use your good towels or face cloths, or your good sheets on your bed.
- Do not use the kitchen sink, dish cloths or towels after using the toilet or when cleaning up bodily fluids.

**Things you can do:**

- Cover your mattress with a plastic sheet or a large garbage bag (cut open) to protect it.
- Each time you use the toilet, put down the toilet seat cover and flush the toilet twice. This helps to make sure that all bodily waste has been washed away from the inside of the toilet, and limits sprays and splashes that may occur when flushing.
- Hand hygiene is very important after using the toilet. Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds and rinse well.
Things to have on hand in your home:

Keep these items in the bathroom you use, so they will be available if needed:

- Rubber gloves (not vinyl)
- A small container of liquid dish or laundry detergent
- Paper towel or disposable rag
- A small container of 70% alcohol (rubbing alcohol)

**Instructions for handling items soiled with Chemotherapy and bodily waste**

Always wear rubber gloves when you handle linen and/or clothing that may have been contaminated with bodily waste.

Clothing and linens soiled with bodily waste (or less than 30 drops of chemotherapy drug) can be safely washed separately from other laundry. Put through two wash cycles with regular detergent.

Be careful not to get any bodily waste on your clothes or skin. If you get bodily waste on your skin while cleaning up a spill, wash the area gently with soap and water for 15 minutes.

For surfaces, wear rubber gloves and wipe surfaces with paper towel or a disposable rag. Use second towel or rag to apply dish or clothing detergent and wipe well. Use fresh paper towel to rinse. Clean same area a second time with 70% alcohol.

If chemotherapy in an amount greater than 30 drops soils linen or clothing, call your visiting nurse.
Disposing of cleaning supplies

• Place paper towel or rags and rubber gloves in two sealed plastic bags (preferably zip-locked).
• Place the bag in your regular garbage container.
• Keep the garbage container in a safe, secure place away from animals and children.
• The garbage container can be put out at the curb on your regular garbage pick up day.
• Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water and rinse well.

Disposing of syringes and needles:

• Put used syringes and needles into a sharps container or other puncture-proof container. Do not try to recap needles.
• Most pharmacies will accept used containers for disposal, if you have obtained the needles and containers from them. Ask the pharmacy that supplied your syringes and needles if they do this.
• Municipalities have arrangements for disposal of sharps containers and other hazardous waste; please consult your local municipality for information on disposal locations.
• If you have received needles and a sharps container through your local Community Care Access Centre (CCAC), the pharmacy that delivered your supplies can pick up your sharps container.
I am taking chemotherapeutic drugs in pill form. Are any special precautions needed to protect myself and my family?

Even though you are now taking your chemotherapeutic drugs in pill form, you still need to be careful when handling them. Avoid crushing your pills, this might spread the chemotherapeutic drugs into the air and could be breathed in by your family or caregiver. If you cannot take your chemotherapeutic drug in pill form, ask your doctor for another option.

Precautions to follow:

• The person taking the chemotherapeutic drugs should be the only one handling the pills.
• Keep the drugs in their original package; do not use a dosette.
• If each of your pills are in separate packages:
  – Tear open the package
  – Take your prescribed dose
  – Throw the wrapper in your regular garbage
  – Wash your hands, as this will help stop any surface contamination of your home

• If your pills come in a pharmacy bottle:
  – Shake out your prescribed dose into your hand
  – Take your prescribed dose
  – Wash your hands, as this will help stop any surface contamination of your home

• If you need help to take your pills:
  – Family/caregivers should wear disposable gloves to protect their hands
– Throw disposable gloves in regular garbage without touching the outside of the gloves
– Your caregiver should wash his or her hands after helping you take your pills

Acknowledgments

Access Centre for Community Care, Lanark, Leeds and Grenville

Bayshore Home Health

Community Care Access Centre for Eastern Counties

COTA Health

Ottawa Community Care Access Centre

ParaMed Home Health Care

Renfrew County Community Care Access Centre

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WeCare Home Health Services

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