



# Safe handling of chemotherapy medicines

An information guide for patients, parents and carers

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

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 foodstuff. Medicines that need to be stored at room temperature should be kept in a cupboard out of reach of children.

## What precautions should I take?

Always handle the chemotherapy medicine with care. Do not touch the tablets, capsules or liquid directly with your hands. When handling tablets do not crush or break in half. If you are likely to come into contact with chemotherapy medicine, you must wear a pair of non-sterile disposable gloves. Always wash your hands thoroughly before and after giving the chemotherapy medicine or handling any spillage.

Please refer to the specific patient information leaflet for each drug for any further safe handling advice.

**If you are pregnant, think you may be pregnant or are breastfeeding,** avoid handling chemotherapy medicine if at all possible. Please discuss safe handling and disposal of chemotherapy medicines with your nurse or pharmacist. If the oral chemotherapy medicine looks different from your usual prescription — do not use. Contact the hospital at which you/your child is being treated for advice.

## What should I 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 the items 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?

If your child is on a clinical trial or on 'home maintenance' for leukaemia treatment, then all medicines, including empty containers, must be returned to your hospital.

If you have not been asked to return your chemotherapy to the hospital then:

- 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, (not sealed) and stored out of reach of children – seal it and return it to your hospital when it is two thirds full
- 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 and after use
- double bag and dispose of gloves and all items used for cleaning with household waste
- to protect skin from contaminated wee and poo during nappy changes apply barrier cream



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### Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) is a leading national charity and expert voice for all childhood cancers.

Each week in the UK and Ireland, more than 30 children are diagnosed with cancer. Our network of dedicated professional members work together in treatment, care and research to help shape a future where all children with cancer survive and live happy, healthy and independent lives.

We fund and support innovative world-class research and collaborate, both nationally and internationally, to drive forward improvements in childhood cancer. Our award-winning information resources help lessen the anxiety, stress and loneliness commonly felt by families, giving support throughout the cancer journey.

Our work is funded by donations. If you would like to help, text 'CCLG' to 70085 to donate £3. You may be charged for one text message at your network's standard or charity rate. CCLG (registered charity numbers 1182637 and SC049948) will receive 100% of your donation. CCLG publications on a variety of topics related to children's cancer are available to order or download free of charge from our website. If you have any comments on this factsheet, please contact us at [publications@cclg.org.uk](mailto:publications@cclg.org.uk)