

Information for Residential Care Staff Handling Cytotoxic Drugs

Cytotoxic drugs (chemotherapy) are hazardous drugs that destroy or damage rapidly dividing cells such as cancer cells. They can also damage healthy cells which are rapidly dividing (e.g. mucosal cells and blood cells) but these recover more quickly than the cancer cells. Due to this damage on healthy tissue, chemotherapy requires safe handling to minimise risk to staff.

Chemotherapy is removed from the body through body fluids i.e. vomit, urine, bowel motions, blood, saliva and sweat. The first **48 hours** post chemotherapy administration is the most hazardous period for drug excretion, however many drugs are excreted for up to 7 days post administration. Follow safe handling precautions during these 7 days.

Pregnant or breastfeeding staff should avoid handling chemotherapy drugs and affected body fluids.

Preparation of chemotherapy drugs

- Oral
- Ointment
- Injections
- Eye drops

Minimising exposure

- **Ensure staff are aware of which drugs they are administering are chemotherapy**
- Ensure all staff at the Residential Care Facility (nurses, kitchen, cleaning staff, etc.) are aware the patient is receiving chemotherapy, (have a coloured cytotoxic label in the patient's room).
- Store chemotherapy as per the directions of your pharmacist.
- Wear **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** i.e. **plastic apron and disposable gloves**, when handling, administering and disposing of chemotherapy equipment or waste.
- If staff have any contact with chemotherapy drugs or body waste on their skin they should wash the affected area with soap and flush thoroughly with water
- If any chemotherapy drug splashes the eye, wash the eye with saline for at least 15 minutes
- Complete hand hygiene (HH) after disposal of **PPE**
- Return unused, expired and damaged medicines to the pharmacy for safe disposal

Administering chemotherapy

Where possible, encourage patients to self-administer oral chemotherapy

Staff administering chemotherapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use PPE • Use a no-touch technique • Dispose of PPE in a separate plastic bag, tie off and place in general rubbish bag • If tablets are accidentally handled, wash hands thoroughly with warm, soapy water • Do not crush, dissolve or break chemotherapy tablets; if patients are unable to swallow tablets contact the prescribing doctor • When administering sub cutaneous chemotherapy drugs, place used syringe in a screw top glass jar and return to dispensing pharmacy, your local hospital or to the Oncology/Haematology Department for disposal
Managing body waste and/or cytotoxic spill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with body waste and spills immediately as they present a high risk of exposure to staff • Use PPE (double glove) when assisting a patient with a colostomy, ileostomy, catheter or incontinent pads • Use PPE and paper towels or plastic backed sheets to clean up any spills of urine, bowel motions or vomit • Dispose of PPE and any equipment used in a separate plastic bag, tie off and place inside general rubbish bag • Flush waste in a toilet using a full flush with the lid down • Use PPE when washing any surfaces contaminated with chemotherapy with hot water and household cleaner
Managing chemotherapy contaminated linen and clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use PPE when handling any contaminated linen • Bag and wash linen immediately and separately in a hot wash • Wash contaminated patient clothing separately in a hot wash • If sending personal clothing home with family, instruct them to use disposable gloves or a no touch technique to empty contaminated clothing into the washing machine and wash clothes on a hot wash
Handling deceased patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear PPE when handling the body of a patient who received chemotherapy within 7 days • Dispose of PPE in a separate plastic bag, tie off and put out in general rubbish bag • Notify whoever is collecting the body that the patient has had chemotherapy in the last 7 days.

For any further queries please contact the Canterbury Regional Cancer and Haematology Service. Oncology Dept: (03)364 0020. Haematology Dept: (03)364 0384 or (03)364 0060

This document is supported by the Ministry of Health: Medicines Care Guides for Residential Aged Care, May 2011