

Hazardous Drug Safety for the Home Caregiver

This handout will tell you how to stay safe while caring for someone who is being treated with a hazardous drug.

Hazardous drugs can produce cancer, harm an embryo or fetus, damage or mutate DNA, or cause other health hazards. They could cause skin rashes, allergic reactions, mouth and nasal sores, nausea, vomiting, eye irritation, headaches, flu-like symptoms, and hair loss.

While medicines help the person getting the treatment, there are risks for caregivers. You could be exposed while touching the drug or touching urine, vomit, stool, or other body fluids.

How do I protect myself?

Family members and caregivers should take extra care to prevent exposure. You should wear gloves when:

- Touching hazardous drugs.
- Handling body fluids (tears, breast milk, urine, vomit, or stool).
- Helping use the toilet. Close the toilet lid before flushing.
- Touching soiled linens. Hold the linens away from your body. Put it in a washing machine or plastic bag as soon as you can. Wash alone in hot water with detergent through two full wash cycles.
- Cleaning body fluids off surfaces or carpet. Use paper towels to wash the spots with soap and water. Rinse well.

Wash your hands with soap and water after taking off your gloves. All waste can go into the normal trash at home.

Why do hospital staff take more precautions?

Hospital staff are at higher risk because they are exposed to many hazardous drugs. Long term exposure can lead to serious and long-term effects. Staff may gown, double glove, and at times, wear face shields or masks. They will also dispose of the waste in special plastic bags.

Where should I store hazardous drugs at home?

As with other medicines, keep all hazardous drugs away from children and pets. Avoid storing or handling these medicines where food is prepared or eaten. Keep it in its original, labeled container. If you need to store it in the fridge, keep it in a plastic bag away from open food.

How should I break or crush a hazardous drug in pill form?

Before you break or crush a pill, talk to your pharmacist to make sure it is safe. If it is okay to break a pill, put on gloves. Use a pill splicer inside a small plastic bag. The pill splicer should be stored in the sealed plastic bag. Put on gloves. If you have a mask or protective eyewear, wear it. Then, place the pill in a small plastic bag and seal it. Crush the pill with the back of a spoon. Pour it into a small pill cup. Wash the area with soap and water.

Where do I dispose of any unused hazardous drugs?

You should dispose of unused medicines in a **MedDrop**. To find your local **MedDrop**, ask your local pharmacist or check online. You will need to put the pill bottles in a plastic bag and drop them in the drop box.

Note: Do not dispose of any supplies used for injections or infusions in the drop box. This includes needles and syringes.

What should I do if I get hazardous drugs on my skin or eyes?

Wash any skin that touched a hazardous drug or body waste at once with soap and water. Rinse and pat dry. If the drug splashes in your eye, keep the eye open and rinse it right away with fast running lukewarm tap water for 15 minutes. Call the regional **Poison Control Center 1-800-222-1222**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2020 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7286.