



Home Safety for Patients Receiving Anti-Cancer Medications

If you receive anti-cancer medications in a clinic, in the hospital, or at home, you may see your care team wear gloves, a mask, a gown, eye protection, and more while giving you your cancer treatment. These items are called personal protective equipment (PPE). This equipment keeps your care team from being exposed to the medications.

It's important to also keep yourself and your loved ones safe from being exposed to the medication. Before starting treatment, ask your care team about any steps you may need to take while at home.

Your provider will talk with you about the medications you are getting and how to handle bodily waste, trash, laundry, spills, and sexual contact. Below, we will give some general tips for safely handling bodily waste at home once you've had your medication.

What are anti-cancer medications?

Anti-cancer medications can be [chemotherapy](#), biotherapy, [targeted therapy](#), [immunotherapy](#), and [hormone therapy](#). This article calls these medications "anti-cancer," but they may be used to treat things other than cancer.

How do I handle body waste after cancer treatment?

Many anti-cancer medications leave your body through urine, bowel movements, vomit, and blood for about 48 to 72 hours (2 to 3 days) after your treatment has stopped. The steps below should be followed during that time:

- After using the toilet, close the lid and flush. Your care team will let you know if you need to take any other precautions while using the toilet, such as flushing twice.
- Men should urinate sitting down to avoid splashing out of the bowl.
- After using the toilet, wash your hands well with [soap and water](#).
- Wear gloves when cleaning the toilet, cleaning up any urine, stool, or vomit, or changing diapers/incontinence pads. Wash your hands with the gloves on, then remove the gloves, throw them in the trash and wash your hands again with soap and water.
- If using a bedpan or urinal, wear gloves and gently dump the waste into the toilet (close to the water) to avoid splashing. While wearing the gloves, wash the container with soap and water after each use.
- Diapers can be thrown out in the regular trash.
- If you have an [ostomy](#), wear gloves when emptying the bag. Wash the collection bag once a day with soap and water.

How do I handle trash and laundry?

Research is ongoing about the best and safest ways to handle trash and laundry that have bodily waste on them after cancer treatment. Unless told otherwise, for 48 to 72 hours after your treatment you should:

- Wear gloves to handle contaminated (dirty) trash or laundry. Wash your hands before and after removing the gloves.
- Place contaminated trash in special bags if you were given them. You can also double up plastic leak-proof bags and place them in your regular trash.
- If possible, wash contaminated laundry right away. If you cannot wash it right away, place it in a leak-proof plastic bag and wash it as soon as possible.
- Wash contaminated and soiled laundry by itself, separately from other laundry. Use regular laundry detergent and warm or hot water. Some cancer groups recommend washing heavily contaminated laundry (soaked through in spots) two times with bleach and hot water to make sure it has all been washed. If you have any questions about how to clean up bodily waste, call your care team.

How do I handle a spill?

If anti-cancer medications or body fluids are spilled or splashed within 48 to 72 hours after treatment:

- Wear gloves to clean up the spill/splash.
- Wipe up the spill with paper towels.
- Clean the area with soap and water. Rinse using paper towels.
- Throw out trash in the special waste containers (if you were given them) or double bag in leak-proof plastic bags.
- Wash hands before and after removing gloves.

What about sexual contact?

Anti-cancer medications can also be excreted (leave your body) in body fluids, such as sweat, saliva, semen, and vaginal fluid. Your provider will tell you if there is anything specific you have to do based on the medication you are receiving. In general, to prevent your partner from being exposed:

- Use condoms during oral sex and intercourse for at least 48 to 72 hours after treatment. This applies to both the person receiving chemotherapy and their partner. Your care team will tell you if there is a need for longer use depending on the medication you are on.
- Birth control should be used to prevent pregnancy while on anti-cancer medications and often for months or years after therapy, depending on the medication. Anti-cancer medications can have harmful side effects to a fetus, especially in the first trimester. Menstrual cycles can become irregular during and after treatment, so you may not know if you are at a time in your cycle when you could become pregnant or if you are actually pregnant. Each anti-cancer medication has its own specific timeframe for birth control use. Talk with your care team about birth control options, as some hormonal options may not be safe for you to take after cancer treatment.

How do I keep my loved ones safe?

- Hugging and kissing are safe for you and your partner or family members.
- You can visit, sit with, hug, and kiss the children in your life.
- You can be around pregnant women, though (if possible) they should not clean up any of your bodily fluids after you have treatment.
- You can share a bathroom with others. If bodily fluids splash on the toilet, wear gloves and clean the area with soap and water before others use the toilet.

Home safety while taking anti-cancer medications is important. Be sure to talk with your care team about any

questions or concerns you might have about being home after cancer treatment. The goal is to help you feel relaxed, safe, and prepared while at home.

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