

# Hazardous Medication Precautions

## What are hazardous medications?

Sometimes, the best care involves medications that are helpful but very strong. Some of these medications change the way cells grow or how your body fights diseases. This means they can be dangerous (hazardous) to other people or to pets. **Precautions** are steps that you or others need to take when using these medications. This does not mean that you have to stop being around other people, but you will need to take special care to reduce the risk to others.

## What kinds of medications are hazardous?

Some hazardous medications include:

- **Chemotherapy** [kee-moe-THAIR-eh-pee] **medications** that keep certain cells from growing or acting abnormally
- **Immunotherapy** [in-myoo-no-thair-eh-pee] **medications** that boost the body's immune (disease fighting) system
- **Immunosuppressant** [im-myoo-no-suh-PRESS-ent] **medications** that suppress the immune system

These medications may be given as pills, skin creams, injections, or through an IV (intravenous) line.

## Call your pharmacist if you have questions about your medications or any safety concerns.

## How do I keep others safe while at home?

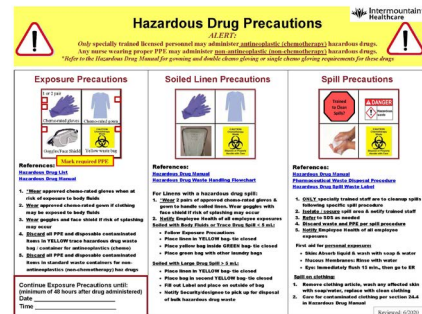
To keep others safe at home, follow these steps:

- **Use caution around anyone who is pregnant or breastfeeding.** Those who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or who may become pregnant, should NOT handle these medications.
- **The medication should only be handled by the person taking it or the caregiver, if possible.**
- **Wash your hands** before and after handling the medication.
- **Wear latex or nitrile gloves** when using all medications, except pills. Wash your hands before putting on the gloves. When finished, throw the gloves away and wash your hands again.
- **Keep others away from any spills.** Clean up the spill right away. Clean the area with a moist paper towel and dish detergent, then rinse. Use a spill kit if you are given one. Paper towels or cloths used to clean a spill can be put in the regular trash.
- **If medication gets on the skin,** wash and rinse the area using soap and a lot of water. If the skin stays red for more than an hour, call your doctor.
- **If medication gets into the eye,** rinse the eye for 15 minutes using tap water. Seek emergency care.

## How do I keep others safe while in the hospital?

If hazardous medications are given to you when you are in the hospital — or within 48 hours (2 days) before you go to the hospital — your care team will need to take steps to protect themselves when handling your medication, body fluids (vomit, pee, poop), and soiled laundry.

You may see a sign like the one at right hanging in the hospital room or on the door to remind your care team about steps they need to take to stay safe.



## Staying safe at home *(continued)*

- **Take extra steps to avoid infection.** Often, these medications interfere with the body's ability to fight infections. While you are taking them, try to avoid contact with people who are sick, wash your hands often, and keep your home clean.

### Giving medication

**Do not share your medications.** Sharing can be dangerous with any medication, but this is especially true for hazardous medications. Follow the guidelines below to be safe with these types of medication:

- **Capsules or tablets.** Do not crush or break pills unless your doctor or pharmacist tells you to.
- **Liquids taken by mouth (oral).** Use an oral syringe to measure each dose. This helps avoid spills. Clean and then store the syringe with the medication.
- **Ointments or creams.** Remember to wash your hands both before and after putting on the gloves.
- **IV or injected medications.** Put all supplies and empty containers in a separate bag in a designated household trash container. Empty this container in the outside trash often.

### Storing and getting rid of medication

- The pharmacy may give you the medication in a resealable plastic bag. **Store the medication in the same bag in a cool, dry place** (not the bathroom). Keep it out of the reach of children and pets.
- **Infused or injected medications may require special handling.** If you have unused or partially-used doses of IV medication, call your pharmacist for directions.
- **Do not flush leftover medication down the toilet.** Take any leftover oral medication or ointments to a medication disposal location.

### Handling body fluids and laundry

- **Take extra care with your body fluids and laundry** while using the medication and for 48 hours after. (Body fluids include vomit, pee, and poop.)
- **Protect your hands.** Always wear latex or nitrile gloves when handling body fluids, washing linens, or changing diapers. Wash your hands after removing the gloves.
- **Clean up body fluids.** Immediately clean up any body fluids.
- **Take extra steps to clean laundry soiled with body fluids or medication.** Wash clothing, sheets, or other items right away, separate from other laundry. Use 2 wash and rinse cycles with hot water.
- **Change diapers often, and dispose of them in one place.** For young children taking the medication, change diapers often to reduce the amount of time the skin touches and body fluids. With each diaper change, completely clean the area. Choose one specific place to dispose of diapers, rather than using trash cans around the house. For example, use a bathroom diaper pail. Empty the container in the outside trash often.

#### When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you have:

- Any unexpected or severe side effects such as a rash, bleeding, or a fever of 101 °F or 38.3 °C or higher.
- Your skin stays red for more than 1 hour after a spill is washed off.

**Seek emergency care if you get medication in your eyes.**

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