

Handling hazardous drugs safely at home: Oral hazardous drugs

This information provides tips on handling oral hazardous drugs safely at home. By working safely with these drugs, you can lessen the chance of exposing yourself, your family and friends as well as the environment to these chemicals.

Patient Name
Date
Hazardous Drug

Supplies

- Disposable nitrile (not latex) gloves for handling hazardous drugs
- Disposable plastic medication cups or oral syringes
- Home hazardous drug spill kit if your drug is a liquid formulation

Handling hazardous drugs

- Wash your hands before and after handling hazardous drugs.
- Wear disposable nitrile gloves when handling any type of hazardous drugs (liquid, tablets, or capsules). Do not use torn or punctured gloves.
- Use disposable plastic medicine cups to transfer pill from medicine bottle.
- Discard any used gloves, medicine cups, and oral syringes in a plastic bag. Tie or seal the plastic bag and place in your household trash bag for disposal.

Storing hazardous drugs

- Your nurse or pharmacist will tell you if there are special storage instructions.
- Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Keep your drug separate from other family members' medications.
- If the drug needs refrigeration, do not place it in or near the freezer, and do separate it from other foods (use a crisper bin or place the medication in a container).
- Keep drug in its original container. Do not put oral hazardous drugs in a pill box with other daily medications.
- Keep drug away from moisture (for example, do not store in the bathroom).

Taking your hazardous drug

- Your nurse or pharmacist will advise you of your administration schedule and routine.
- When at all possible, you should take your hazardous drug without the help of other family members or caregivers. Pregnant women should not assist you to handle hazardous drugs.
- It is important for you to follow the instructions for how to take the drug. Do not skip a dose without discussing it with your medical team.

- If you forget to take a dose, do not take double the dose next time. Contact your research nurse to discuss what to do if you miss a dose.
- Do not crush or break pills. If you are unable to swallow them, contact your health care provider.

Accidental hazardous drug spills

- If you are taking a liquid hazardous drug you will receive a home emergency spill kit.
- Clean small hazardous drug spills, less than a teaspoon, immediately. Wear two pairs of nitrile gloves and blot the spill dry with a gauze pad contained in your home spill kit. Clean the area three times with soap and water.
- For larger spills, follow the instructions on the spill kit. Clean the area three times and dispose of all materials used to clean and contain the spill in specially marked chemotherapy waste bags contained in the home spill kit. Seal the waste bag securely and return to the patient care unit for disposal.
- Immediately take off clothing soiled with hazardous drugs or soiled with body fluids (urine, feces, or drenching sweat). When handling bed linens or clothing soiled by hazardous drugs, do not touch the soiled area with your bare hands. Wear nitrile gloves and a gown (if available). Immediately place the linens or clothing in the washing machine. Wash items in hot water, separate from other laundry. If you are unable to wash these items immediately, place them in a sealed plastic bag until they can be washed.

Skin care for accidental splashes

- Hazardous drugs spilled on your skin may cause irritation. Wash the area thoroughly with soap and water, dry the area, and contact your doctor. Observe the skin for the next 7 days. If redness or skin irritation occurs, contact your doctor.
- If the drug splashes into your eye, flush the eye with tap water for at least 15 minutes and contact your doctor.

Disposing of body waste while you take hazardous drugs

- You may use the bathroom as usual. Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet.
- Toilets should be double-flushed with the lid down each time they are used for 48 hours after receiving hazardous drugs.
- All caregivers must wear nitrile gloves when handling your sweat-soaked linens and clothing or your blood, urine, stool, or vomitus for 48 hours after you receive hazardous drugs.
- After using any devices for bodily waste, thoroughly wash your hands and the devices with soap and water.
- Diapers should be placed in “zip-lock” plastic bags for disposal, for 48 hours after receiving hazardous drugs.

This information is prepared specifically for persons taking part in clinical research at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and may not apply to patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your health care team.

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