



Cytotoxic Medications

What you need to know

What is a cytotoxic medication?

Cytotoxic medications, also known as antineoplastic agents, are primarily used to treat cancer, most often as part of a chemotherapy treatment.

The use of cytotoxic medications is growing, and is now being used to treat conditions such as rheumatoid and juvenile arthritis.

Cytotoxic medications inhibit cell growth, which means that both cancerous cells and non-cancerous cells are affected and damaged.

Safety concerns to workers

- Workers who have to interact with cytotoxic medications, such as preparing or administering them as well as cleaning equipment, linens, or facilities, have tested positive as having the medication in their urine.
- Acute health concerns include skin, eye and mucous membrane irritation, allergic-type reactions, and hair loss.
- Chronic health concerns include damage to liver, kidney, lungs and heart. Cytotoxic medications have also been linked to pregnancy-related health concerns such as spontaneous abortions, malformed fetuses, and instances of infertility.
- Cytotoxic medications can enter the body through inhalation, skin absorption, ingestion, and through handling of contaminated body waste.

How to protect yourself from cytotoxic medications

- Ask your employer for a copy of their policies and procedures when dealing with cytotoxic medications. Also ask to review a copy of your hazard assessment, and review how your employer eliminates or controls the hazard.
- When handling cytotoxic medications wear protective gloves made of vinyl or nitrile rubber. It is recommended that workers wear two pairs of gloves at a time. Wear a long sleeved gown, with elastic cuffs. Also wear approved eye protection and if a risk of splashing exists, wear a full-faced shield.
- If the medication can become airborne, the use of a properly fit-tested respirator, such as a N95 or N100, is strongly recommended.
- If you are required to handle biological fluids, excretions, contaminated bedding/clothing, or soiled equipment of patients who have received cytotoxic medications, it is strongly recommended you wear two pairs of gloves, a protective gown, a properly fit-tested respirator or a face shield where a risk of splashing is possible.
- Cytotoxic waste materials should be handled differently than regular waste materials. It is recommended that all cytotoxic waste materials be placed in a labelled bag, so that other workers are aware of the hazard.



AUPE strongly encourages all workers who have dealt with cytotoxic medications either directly or indirectly and without any proper personal protective equipment to file a workers report with the Workers' Compensation Board, as a report-only claim.