



Chemotherapy Information for Pet Owners

Chemotherapy is medication used to treat cancer. It is given either as oral medication or by injection.

Dogs and cats tolerate chemotherapy treatment well. Approximately 20% will experience nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea following chemotherapy. This tends to occur within the 5 days following treatment and resolves within a few days. Your vet can provide medications to aid recovery. Your vet may also reduce further doses of chemotherapy to maintain excellent quality of life.

Hair loss can occur in breeds with continuously growing hair (e.g. poodles). Some dogs and cats will also lose their whiskers but this is less common.

Occasionally patients receiving chemotherapy will develop serious infections during their treatment due to reduced immunity. A veterinarian should assess any chemotherapy patient that is unwell as soon as possible as antibiotic treatment may be required.

Health and Safety Aspects of Chemotherapy

Patients excrete small amounts of chemotherapy drugs in the urine, faeces, vomit and saliva. Chemotherapy drugs are designed to damage cells. Although the impact on human health is not known, it is prudent to avoid exposure to the drugs and metabolites in excreta as much as possible.

The greatest period of risk of exposure to cytotoxic drug residues is in the first 7 days of treatment however some drugs are present in excreta for up to a month.

Children, women who are pregnant or breast-feeding and those who are immune-compromised should take particular care to avoid contact with chemotherapy drugs and their metabolites.

If your pet accidentally urinates or defecates in the home wear gloves to clean the urine or faeces and take care not to splash urine as this may aerosolise drug metabolites. Use household detergents and wash the area several times and dry with disposable absorbent towels. Alkaline detergents (pH of at least 10) are recommended where possible. Wear gloves to empty cat litter trays.



Urine outdoors can be gently hosed to dilute the urine if there are large volumes in a small area.

Defecation outside should be collected in a bag and disposed of doubled bagged.

If bedding is very soiled you may need to dispose of it as cytotoxic waste using the waste disposal bins at your vet. For minimal soiling wash bedding separately in the washing machine on a warm wash and repeat the wash twice.

Avoid contact with saliva by discouraging licking and washing skin if unexpected licking occurs.

Always store oral chemotherapy agents as advised on the label. Wear gloves to administer chemotherapy and give medications whole (do not split/crush/open capsules).

Wash hands following contact with chemotherapy drugs, animals receiving treatment or their waste products.

Any drugs that are no longer required can be disposed of by your vet clinic or pharmacy.

Chemotherapy drugs are highly toxic if ingested. Always keep medications out of reach of children and seek emergency medical attention if ingested.