

Hazardous Drugs Exposure Control

April 2021

Update for Physicians: Hazardous Drugs Exposure Control

In our commitment to safe workplaces, Northern Health is implementing a regional hazardous drug exposure control program that keeps workers safe, meets health care needs of patients/residents/clients, and meets WorkSafeBC regulatory requirements.

Occupational exposure to hazardous drugs has been recognized as a risk in healthcare for over 35 years. In 2004, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) published “Preventing Occupational Exposures to Antineoplastic and Other Hazardous Drugs in Health Care Settings” and since then, as the list of drugs with known or potential occupational health risks has grown, so too has recognition that more needs to be done to prevent exposure in the workplace.

Physicians and/or healthcare workers may be exposed to hazardous drugs and related waste throughout the medication circuit – during compounding, administration, through exposure to blood and body fluids during the precautionary period, when handling waste or cleaning up spills.

Northern Health has established a multi-stakeholder working group to develop resources and guide implementation of the hazardous drug exposure control program. Examples of changes you may see in facilities are:

- Use of personal protective equipment by nurses when administering these drugs, by care staff when they may be exposed to body fluids during the precautionary period, by cleaning staff when cleaning areas where there is higher risk of drug residue
- Signage in patient/resident rooms indicating precautionary period controls
- Requests to review hazardous medications when crushing them creates particulate hazard
- Final dosage forms used wherever possible; for example, methotrexate supplied in commercially available syringes and cessation of use of vials outside of pharmacy preparation in biological safety cabinets.

The [BC Hazardous Drug List](#) is being updated to align with NIOSH 2020 and the health authorities are working on related updates to the provincial exposure control program. In addition, WorkSafeBC has proposed updates to Part 6 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation: Cytotoxic Drugs. Northern Health will update our hazardous drugs exposure control program to incorporate these updates moving forward and are committed to keeping you informed as the hazardous drugs program continues to evolve.

Additional information

Northern Health policy: [Hazardous Drugs Exposure Control Program](#)

Contact: workplacehealthandsafety@northernhealth.ca

References

BC Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (1997). Section [6.42-6.58](#) and [G-6.42-6.53\(2\)](#).

Ganjo, M.C., Kienle, P., McEvoy, G.K. (December 2018). The evolution of hazardous drug safety: Thirty-five years of protecting healthcare personnel. *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy*, Volume 75, Issue 24, Pages 1970–1971.
<https://doi.org/10.2146/ajhp180731>

NIOSH (2004). [NIOSH Alert: Preventing Occupational Exposures to Antineoplastic and Other Hazardous Drugs in Health Care Settings](#). Cincinnati OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH (2020). [NIOSH list of hazardous drugs in healthcare settings 2020](#). By Connor TH, MacKenzie BA, DeBord DG, Trout DB, O’Callaghan JP, Ovesen JL, Whittaker C. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH (2020). [Managing Hazardous Drug Exposures: Information for Healthcare Settings](#). By Hodson L, Ovesen J, Couch J, Hirst D, Lawson C, Lentz TJ, MacKenzie B, and Mead K. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health