FAST FACT, REF FF:007:02

HSE GUIDELINE ON THE SAFE HANDLING OF CYTOTOXIC DRUGS 2022

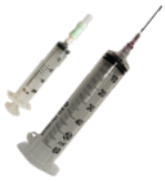
FAST FACTS *provide a brief overview of various health and safety topics to support our managers, employees, safety representatives and others. Why not bring this to your Safety Committees/Departmental Meeting for discussion? Additional information is available by visiting our website at: https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/health-and-safety/*

This FAST FACT provides a brief overview of the **HSE Guideline on the Safe Handling of Cytotoxic Drugs 2022**. The guideline can be downloaded here.

DID YOU KNOW THAT

Cytotoxic drugs are used in hospital settings and the community in the treatment of cancers and non-malignant diseases (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis). Exposure to cytotoxic drugs may be through skin contact, skin absorption, inhalation of aerosols or dusts, ingestion and needle stick injuries resulting from a number of activities including:

- Drug receipt/storage/preparation
- Drug administration
- Patient care activities
- Handling patient waste and contaminated laundry
- Transport and waste disposal
- Cleaning spills



DEFINITION (AS PER GUIDELINE)

Cytotoxic drugs are therapeutic agents intended for, but not limited to, the treatment of cancer. Cytotoxic drugs are hazardous drugs that exhibit one or more of the following characteristics in humans or animals:

- Carcinogenicity
- Mutagenicity (genotoxicity)
- Teratogenicity
- Reproductive or developmental toxicity
- Organ toxicity at low doses

POLICY STATEMENT

- It is the policy of the HSE to ensure the protection of employees from the potential risks related to the occupational exposure to cytotoxic drugs.

PURPOSE

- This Guideline is intended to raise awareness among employers and employees of the occupational hazards associated with cytotoxic drugs and will assist in the development of the necessary risk assessments, protocols and procedures to ensure the safety, health and welfare of employees and others who may be exposed, and to provide information about legislative requirements.

SCOPE

- The Guideline applies to all employees whose work activities may involve risk of occupational exposure to cytotoxic drugs.
- The Guideline does not deal with patient care, except in the context of workplace health and safety, and hence does not provide information on the **clinical/patient treatment aspects of prescribing, preparing, and administering of oral treatment cytotoxic drugs.**
- In line with the *HSE Code of Governance (2021)* Section 38 and Section 39 organisations are to adopt this policy or develop a policy of their own which is consistent with this policy and provide an assurance to the HSE regarding same.

KEY HEALTH & SAFETY LEGISLATION

- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens) Regulations, 2001 and amendment 2015 and 2019 Regulations
- Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Chemical Agents) Regulations 2001 to 2021

MANAGER'S KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Assess any risk to any employee's health or safety resulting from any activity likely to involve a risk of exposure to a cytotoxic drug, and to determine the nature, degree, routes of exposure and duration of any employee's exposure, and to implement the identified control measures. Refer to Section 2.0, Part A of the Guideline.
- Reduce the use of cytotoxic drugs (in so far as is technically possible) by replacing them with substances, preparations or processes which eliminates or reduces the risk to an employee's health or safety.
- Ensure when cytotoxic drugs are in use they are (in so far as is technically possible) used in a closed system.

EMPLOYEE'S KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Adhere to and apply this guideline, local procedures and safe systems of work and any associated risk assessments and risk controls.
- Attending relevant training as appropriate.

Detailed Roles and Responsibilities are detailed in the HSE Guideline on the Safe Handling of Cytotoxic Drugs 2022.

RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The hazard identification and risk assessment process will establish the cytotoxic drugs in use, who is at risk, the route of exposure, the specific activities where there is a risk of exposure and the control measures required. The Cytotoxic Drug Risk Assessment form CF:024 is available to download here.

The risk assessment process for a given task comprises of the following **FOUR STEPS** which are detailed in Section 2.0, Part A of the Guideline:

Step 1 - Identify the **Hazard** associated with the work activity

Step 2 - Identify the **Risks** associated with the hazard

Step 3 - **Assess** and Rate the Risk

Step 4 - Identify any **additional control measures**

Cytotoxic Drug Risk Assessment Form - Part 1 of 2	
Division:	Source of Risk:
HG/CHO/NAS Function:	Primary Impact Category:
Hospital Site/Service:	Risk Type:
Dept/Service Site:	Name of Risk Owner (BLOCKS):
Date of Assessment:	Signature of Risk Owner:
Unique ID No:	Risk Co-ordinator:
	*Risk Assessor (s):
Description of Work Activity:	
A separate risk assessment must be completed for powders (prior to reconstitution); capsules/tablets; and liquids. Tick as appropriate: Powders ☐ Capsules / tablets ☐ Liquids ☐	
Identify the Cytotoxic Drugs covered by this risk assessment: (Please cross reference to database or attach drug list)	

RISK REDUCTION MEASURES

- Risk Reduction Measures are detailed in Appendix II A (Schedule 3, Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens) Regulations, 2001) in the Guideline.
- Further information on control measures refer to Section 2.0, Step 4, Part A, of the Guideline.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

- 2021 Code of Practice for the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Chemical Agents) Regulations (2001-2021) and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Carcinogens) Regulations (2001-2019). Available here.