

OHCPS NEWSLETTER

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USP <800>: Handling Hazardous Drugs in a Healthcare Setting

What is USP<800>?

In 2016, the USP published standards addressing all aspects of handling hazardous medication from receiving, storing, compounding, administration, to disposal. Following these standards will minimize the chances of those that handle hazardous medications from dangerous exposure to these products. The standards were scheduled to take effect on December 1, 2019 but have been on hold until USP 797/795 policies (pharmacy compounding) are finalized. It is uncertain at this time when these policies will start being enforced.

What are Hazardous Drugs?

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) have identified medications that can fall into the following 5 categories:

- Carcinogenic (causes cancer)
- Teratogenic (causes harm to unborn baby)
- Reproductive toxicity (effects fertility)
- Organ toxicity (harms organs at low doses)
- Genotoxicity (damages genetic info in cells- which can lead to cancer)

The hazardous drugs are further divided into subgroups of: Group 1 (Antineoplastics), Group 2 (Non-Antineoplastics with one or more criteria for a hazardous drug) and Group 3 (Non-Antineoplastics that primarily have adverse reproductive effects).

Some medications may fall into more than one category. NIOSH's list of hazardous drugs can be found at the website listed in References below. It has information about the specific risks for each drug on the list. Other sources with information about these products are manufacturer labeling and Safety Data Sheets.

What determines risks of hazardous drugs?

The risk of these medications is a combination of how much exposure a person has and how hazardous the medication is. Contact with unbroken tablets and capsules normally has minimal exposure. Broken and crushed tablets as well as spills can increase the risk and exposure to the medications.

Handling Hazardous Drugs:

Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn when handling hazardous medications. If only handling unbroken tablets or capsules, gloves are normally okay for most medications. If crushing tablets, full or partial garb (gloves, mask, gown, eye protection, shoe covers, etc.) may be required to prevent contact with tablet/capsule powder. It will be very important that all healthcare facilities develop their own policies on the handling and administration of medications. These policies should include things like: what type of PPE needs to be worn when performing tasks such as splitting or crushing hazardous drugs, what location in the facility can these tasks be completed, and any documentation that will be required. All staff that handles these products should be properly trained on your policies and their competency documented. Use safe work practices and be sure to dispose of hazardous medications or empty containers in a separate bin marked appropriately as per your facility policy.

Any spills of hazardous medications should be handled per your facility's hazardous waste policy, which should include PPE, spill kits and disposal instructions. Check for leaks or broken containers when receiving deliveries. Only trained personnel should handle these types of spills. Never use spray bottles to clean hazardous spills, as it may aerosolize and spread drug residue.

Table 5 on NIOSH's hazardous drug listing is an excellent resource to explain which types of PPE and other special handling should be considered for these products as facilities prepare their own policies on how to follow these requirements.

References:

- NIOSH Hazardous Drugs in Healthcare Settings <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hazdrug/default.html>
- Clinical Pharmacology Online

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