

Flush Risks: What Chemo Drugs Mean For Your Septic Tank

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Chemotherapy and Tank Bacteria

Chemotherapy drugs can negatively impact the treatment chamber in a septic tank by disrupting the beneficial bacteria that break down waste. These drugs, excreted in bodily fluids, contain cytotoxic agents that can kill or inhibit the growth of beneficial bacteria, reducing the system's efficiency. Septic tanks rely on a complex mix of bacteria to digest organic waste. Chemotherapy drugs, being potent chemicals, can disrupt this delicate balance by killing or inhibiting the growth of essential bacteria. Without the proper bacteria, the system will struggle to break down waste effectively. This can lead to an on-site sewage system failure.

85% of patients undergoing chemotherapy treatments are immediately sent home

24-36 hours after treatment, the patient is excreting high amounts of cytotoxic drugs in their urine, feces, vomit and sweat.

To minimize the impact on your on-site sewage septic system, consider the following:

Proper disposal of medications: Avoid flushing unused medications down the toilet

Limit chemical use: Reduce the use of chemical-based cleaning products and disinfectants, as they can also harm beneficial bacteria

Consider frequent pumping: If someone in your household is undergoing chemotherapy or taking strong medications, you might need to pump your septic tank more frequently

Contact a septic system provider: If you have any concerns about your on-site sewage system, contact your local health department or a professional septic contractor

Fast Facts

- Additional pumping of septic tank is likely needed
- Increased maintenance of septic tank may be required
- Never flush unused medications without checking FDA "Flush List"
- Utilize local drug take-back programs to properly dispose of medicines
- Minimize the use of other products that kill bacteria
- Toilet paper usage may increase: do not use thick layered products
- If the household is being served by a water well, testing may need to be performed to ensure drinking water safety

For additional Environmental Public Health information go to: www.in.gov/health/eph

