Reducing the risk of exposure to antineoplastic drugs in veterinary clinics and hospitals

Antineoplastic drugs are used to treat cancer, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, and other conditions. Because they can alter cellular functions at a low dosage, workers who work with or near antineoplastic drugs are at risk of exposure and adverse health effects.

How do exposures occur?

Workers may be exposed to antineoplastic drugs directly while handling these drugs, or indirectly via contact with contaminated surfaces and objects in the workplace. Exposure to antineoplastic drugs can occur through inhalation, absorption through skin or mucous membranes, ingestion, or injection from a needlestick injury.

Who is at risk?

Workers in veterinary settings, including general and specialty veterinarians, technologists and technicians, pharmacists, veterinary support staff, janitorial and laundry workers, and hazardous drug disposal and waste removal contractors.

How can employers reduce the risk of exposures?

To eliminate or effectively reduce the risk of exposures in the workplace, employers and workers should work together on the following steps:

- Step 1: Understand the risks
- Step 2: Implement measures to control the risks
- Step 3: Communicate with workers and others at the workplace
- Step 4: Regularly monitor and update your control measures

Managing workplace risks is an ongoing, cyclical process for employers to monitor how effectively they are reducing the risk of exposures in their workplaces. It's important employers repeat the first three steps whenever there are changes in the workplace or when control measures are not working as intended.

For specific information on how to reduce the risk of exposure to antineoplastic drugs, visit worksafebc.com