



The [National Comprehensive Cancer Network® \(NCCN®\)](#) has launched the [Just Bag It! Campaign for Safe Vincristine Handling](#), calling for health care providers in the U.S. and abroad to always administer the medication vincristine in a mini IV drip-bag in order to prevent fatal medical errors.

Vincristine is an important chemotherapeutic agent properly administered intravenously in the treatment of many patients with leukemia or lymphoma. However, improper administration of vincristine is fatal.

- Vincristine should always be administered intravenously. When it enters the blood, it is highly effective at blocking the growth of cancer by preventing cells from separating. However, vincristine is a neurotoxin that causes peripheral neuropathy when given intravenously and profound neurotoxicity if given into the spinal fluid, which flows around the spinal cord and brain.
- Many patients who receive vincristine have a treatment regimen that includes other chemotherapy drugs that are administered intrathecally, or injected into the spinal fluid with a syringe. If vincristine is mistakenly administered into the spinal fluid, it is uniformly fatal, causing ascending paralysis, neurological defects, and death, usually within a week.

To avoid this error, health care providers should always dilute and administer vincristine in a mini IV-drip bag and never use a syringe to administer the medication.

- This precaution renders it impossible to accidentally administer the medication into the spinal fluid and greatly decreases the chances of improper dosage.
- Through the Just Bag It campaign, NCCN is calling attention to this policy recommendation, which is also endorsed by leading medical organizations such as the [Institute for Safe Medication Practices](#), the [Joint Commission](#), the [World Health Organization](#), and the [Oncology Nursing Society](#).

All 27 of [NCCN's Member Institutions](#), leading U.S. cancer centers, have adopted policies to always “bag it” — and compliance throughout the medical community is increasing.

- According to surveys issued by the Institute for Safe Medication Practices, the number of centers that have implemented the policy in all treatment settings nearly doubled between February 2014 and February 2016. Earlier surveys indicated a similar increase between 2005 and 2012.
- To add your institution's name to the list of cancer treatment providers that have an existing or newly adopted policy for safe vincristine handling, visit www.NCCN.org/JustBagIt.

Your Best Resource in the Fight Against Cancer®

Vincristine errors are relatively rare, but are unique in their level of mortality.

- 125 deaths have been reported in the United States and abroad since the inception of vincristine use in the 1960s.
- Improvements in practice, including manufacturer- and pharmacist-issued warning labels, have reduced the number of deaths, but the error continues to occur.

The benefits of “bagging it” far outweigh the drawbacks.

- Some health care providers may associate the use of an IV bag with a heightened risk of extravasation — or the leaking of a chemotherapy drug into the tissue surrounding the intravenous administration site — but research shows that the risk is extremely low (<.05%) regardless of how vincristine is administered.¹
- Although diluting and administering vincristine in a minibag may entail a change in practice for some providers, it is a simple procedure and the only surefire way to avoid this completely preventable error.

Just Bag It is the latest of NCCN’s long-standing efforts to improve the safe use of drugs and biologics in cancer care.

- For more than 15 years, NCCN’s Best Practices Committee has worked to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of cancer center operations. Part of their mission is to ensure the highest standards of safety for patients by developing guidelines to improve cancer treatment protocols.
- In 2008, the Best Practices Committee led the charge for NCCN to begin publishing Chemotherapy Order Templates ([NCCN Templates](#)®), which detail the most common regimens for many cancers and highlight safety parameters. There are more than 1,500 NCCN Templates® for 86 cancer types used by more than 10,000 subscribers to standardize patient care, reduce medication errors, and anticipate and manage adverse events.

For more information about this campaign, visit www.NCCN.org/JustBagIt.

About NCCN:

Headquartered in Fort Washington, PA, NCCN is a non-profit alliance of leading cancer centers founded in 1995 to ensure that all cancer patients, no matter their location, have access to high-quality, cost-effective treatment. Today, NCCN’s [27 Member Institutions](#) develop treatment guidelines that set the standard for quality cancer care in the United States and abroad. For more information, visit www.NCCN.org.

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¹ ISMP. Death and neurological devastation from intrathecal vinca alkaloids: Prepared in syringes = 120; Prepared in minibags = 0. *ISMP Medication Safety Alert!* 2013;18(18):3.