

Medical Aid in Dying in Vermont (ACT 39) Instructions for Use of the Medication

Provided by Patient's Doctor: _____ Phone: _____
Pharmacist: _____ Phone: _____
Date: _____

To the Patient:

The medications you are receiving are intended to bring about a peaceful death. All the members of your medical and caregiving team hope that you have now communicated with those you love and that you are sure about your decision. You, the patient, can change your mind at any time.

Please read all the information and instructions carefully and make sure that the people who will be supporting you at the end of your life read them as well.

Medications: You are receiving two types of medications:

1. **For Nausea:** Medication to prevent nausea so that you can keep the lethal medication down. You will be taking this medication before taking the lethal medication.
2. **Lethal Medication:** A combination of several medications at very high dosage, intended to cause death, referred to here as "lethal medication."

Instructions for Use: The specific timing for taking each of the medications is in the section of this document called "Instructions for the Planned Day of Dying".

Storage: Store the medications in their closed containers, away from heat and light and where the temperature is between 59 and 86 degrees. The location must be secure, *especially from children and pets.*

Hospice:

Hospice enrollment is ***strongly recommended*** at least 2 weeks before you plan to take the medication to hasten death. You should enroll with the hospice organization in the region of Vermont where your Vermont doctor is located and where you plan to take the medication. If you are already enrolled in hospice in your home state, you can transfer to the care of the appropriate Vermont hospice organization. There are a number of important benefits, including:

Skilled Care: The hospice team provides skilled care and support for people with terminal illness and their families.

These instructions were prepared by Dr. Diana Barnard, Dr. Jaina Clough and Dr. Zail Berry in collaboration with Patient Choices Vermont. More information may be found at PatientChoices.org/clinicians-guide.
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The patient's prescribing physician is solely responsible for providing complete and accurate instructions, taking into account the patient's condition and any special procedures needed.

Support on the Day You Use the Medication: Having a hospice staff person or a trained hospice volunteer present when you take the medication is recommended both for any unexpected issues and for the support of loved ones.

Documentation: Most hospices will ensure that a “Do Not Resuscitate” (DNR) order for emergency personnel is present in the home.

Pronouncement of Death: A hospice nurse will make the pronouncement of death. The pronouncement of death is a legal requirement.

If You Are Not Enrolled in Hospice:

Pronouncement of Death: Without the benefit of a hospice nurse to pronounce death in the home, emergency medical services, police and coroner’s investigators will need to be involved. Avoiding this potentially intrusive and uncomfortable situation is a major benefit of hospice.

COLST/DNR: It is very important that you obtain a COLST (Clinician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) form with the DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) order from your prescribing physician or other clinician (these may be signed by nurse practitioners or physicians’ assistants, as well as by physicians).

Essential Documentation: Before you ingest the medication, ensure that those who are present have in their possession the following documentation:

- COLST form with DNR order
- Pharmacy paperwork with your name on it
- Name and phone number of your prescribing physician – see top of page 1

Planning to Take the Medication - Picking Your Day:

It is strongly advised that you plan to take the medication on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, and that you plan to take it mid-to-late morning. This helps to ensure that the hospice team, doctor, and others will be available when needed rather than on nights and weekends when staffing may be reduced.

Make Sure You Will Be Able to Swallow the Medication:

On the day you plan to take the medications you will need to be able to swallow 2 oz. (1/4 cup) of nonfat liquid within 2 minutes so that you do not become sleepy before all the medication is consumed. If you drink too slowly you may fall asleep before taking all the medication. This can result in complications including a long delay before death occurs. Be prepared:

Practice: If you are experiencing swallowing difficulties in the days leading up to the medication use, practice drinking 1/4 cup of clear juice or water without the medication. If this is difficult, talk to your hospice nurse or doctor about non-oral ways that you might take the medication.

Using a Straw: Some people find the use of a wide straw helpful in ingesting the medication quickly and in reducing the tongue's exposure to the bitterness of the medication. Practice with the clear juice of your preference to see if a wide straw works for you, and if so, plan to have one available.

Chaser of Your Choice: The lethal medication will have a bitter taste and may leave a burning sensation. A small amount of fat-free sorbet, juice or liquor before and after ingestion can help mask the taste. Plan to have some available if this appeals to you. The pharmacist may also provide a flavoring for the same purpose.

Upright Positioning:

You will need to be seated in an upright position to take the medication. You will then need to remain in this position for 20 minutes to reduce the risk of regurgitation or vomiting. We recommend being positioned in a bed when you take the medication. A hospital/electric bed is ideal as this will help other people provide care and repositioning when needed. Otherwise, being upright in bed with pillows for support is a good alternative.

What to Do with Unused Medication:

If for any reason the lethal medication is not used, please return the medication using the packaging provided by the pharmacist. If return packing is not provided, unused medication should be deposited in a medication drop box located at a police station, hospital or pharmacy.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PLANNED DAY OF DYING

Step 1	The night before (or at least 8 hours before) taking the lethal medication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discontinue all solid foods. Minimize any caloric beverages. ➤ Water and other clear liquids are fine in small amounts. ➤ Discontinue all regular medications except those for pain and comfort.
Step 2	30 minutes before taking the lethal medication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Take the anti-nausea medication with sips of clear liquid.
Step 3	25-30 minutes before taking the lethal medication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mix the lethal medication as directed in the instructions on the next page.
Step 4	Taking the lethal medication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sit in an upright position to facilitate swallowing the medication quickly. ➤ Shake the bottle containing the juice and the lethal medication to mix in any settled powder. It will be a thick solution. ➤ Take about a half-teaspoon of sorbet or popsicle to coat the tongue.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Pour the mixture into a short glass and drink all of it immediately, <u>or</u> B. Keep it in the bottle and drink using a <u>wide</u> straw inserted in the bottle.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Take a few small bites of sorbet or popsicle just after taking the medication to ease the bitterness. A sip of liquor or other clear drink may be substituted. ➤ It is legal for another person to hold a straw and cup if the patient is too weak to do so.
Step 5	After ingestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Those present should ensure that the person remains in an upright position for 20 minutes, even if they lose consciousness, to minimize the risk of vomiting. Reclining slightly on pillows is fine. ➤ After 20 minutes, the person can be repositioned to lying down. ➤ After the medication has been taken, wash and rinse all containers used for medication preparation. Rinse the bottle, seal it in a plastic bag, and dispose.

Medication Mixing Instructions

<p>Caution!</p>	<p>These are dangerous medications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Only those people who have studied these instructions and are preparing the medications should be in the mixing area. ➤ Pets should be secured, and children closely supervised.
<p>Supplies you will need</p> <p>Have them all ready before you start</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Paper towel. ➤ Medical gloves may be used but are not required. ➤ 2 ounces of room temperature clear filtered apple juice or water, with flavor additive if applicable. ➤ Measuring cup with spout. ➤ Fat free sorbet or popsicle. ➤ Sealed plastic bag for garbage.
<p>Where to mix</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Choose a secure, well lit, uncluttered surface to mix the medications. ➤ Cover the work surface with a paper towel. Medical gloves may be used but are not required.
<p>Mixing steps</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before opening the bottle of lethal medication, gently tap the bottle so that the powder settles away from the lid. 2. Measure out the ¼ cup of apple juice or water into the measuring cup. 3. Carefully open the bottle away from your face. 4. Pour into the bottle about half the measured apple juice or water. 5. Put the lid back on the bottle and shake vigorously. 6. Open and pour in the remainder of the measured apple juice or water, being careful not to overfill. 7. Secure the lid on the bottle. 8. Again, shake the bottle vigorously to suspend all the powder particles. Check the bottom of the bottle to be sure there is no remaining dry powder.
<p>Bring to the patient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Once the medication has been mixed, the safely capped bottle can be brought to the patient’s bedside. ➤ Wash your hands.

Video: There is a very good video prepared by the American Clinicians Academy on Medical Aid in Dying demonstrating these instructions at: vimeo.com/546241500

What to Expect After Taking the Lethal Medication:

Time to Death: Every individual is different, and time to death after taking medication can vary. Usually the person will become unconscious and in a coma within 3-10 minutes. Most people die peacefully within 2 hours, but occasionally the process may take a number of hours. Once unconscious, the person will not experience any suffering.

Dying Process: There are common changes in the body that occur during any dying process. These can include snoring, gurgling noises, changes in rate of breathing (sometimes slower, sometimes faster), paleness, grayness and coolness of the skin. Rarely, there can be loss of bladder or bowel control. Occasionally there are muscle jerks or twitches, including in the person's face.

How to Determine Death: Death has occurred when breathing has stopped and no pulse or heartbeat can be felt for a period of five minutes. If there is **not** a hospice or other medical professional present, make a note of the time of death.

Time of death: _____

Next Steps: Take as long as you need to be with the body. There is no hurry to have a formal death pronouncement or to have the body removed.

Notify Hospice: Hospice should be notified of the person's death if they are not present. Hospice can facilitate communication with your funeral home or cremation service.

If the person is NOT enrolled in hospice:

Physician: Contact the physician who wrote the prescription and to report the time of death.

911: Contact the emergency medical service (911) to report the death. Inform emergency services that you are reporting an expected death of a person with a terminal illness who has a DNR order. You can request a "silent approach."

Communications with Officials: The emergency responders and responding police officer may or may not be knowledgeable about Medical Aid in Dying. They are required to investigate if the death appears suspicious. Many police departments have social work professionals available. If your interactions with an officer are stressful, feel free to ask for that assistance.