Advocates Call for Federal Action During Worsening Chemotherapy Drug Shortage

An ongoing shortage of chemo meds to treat cancer may force providers to make tough choices about who gets treatment.

July 1, 2026 By Eva Lorenz

Recent coverage of the chemotherapy drug shortage by the The New York Times highlighted ongoing concerns about what may happen when there are not enough medications to treat cancer patients. For example, a shortage of the generic ifosfamide, an injectable medication used to treat sarcomas, lymphomas and testicular cancers is already prompting healthcare professionals to make tough decisions.

“There are some individuals who won’t be able to receive this drug, even if it is the best option for them, which puts pharmacists, doctors, patients and families in a horrific situation,” explained head and neck surgeon Andrew Shuman, MD, a professor at the University of Michigan to the Times.

Chemotherapy drugs are among the top five drug classes in short supply. Of 223 medications in shortage, 22 are for chemotherapy, according to a report from the American Society of Health System Pharmacists published in March 2026. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), manufacturing problems, shipping delays and the decision by some companies to stop producing certain medications are to blame.

Many older chemotherapy drugs are in shortage, including cisplatin (for ovarian, testicular, bladder and other cancers), carboplatin (for ovarian, lung and other cancers) and oxaliplatin (for colorectal cancer).

“These three drugs remain the backbone of many cancer therapies (lung, ovarian, head and neck, testicular, breast, colon cancers),” said oncologist Lucio Gordan, MD, president of the Florida Cancer Specialists and Research Institute, in an email to the New York times.

According to Amanda Forster, vice president of integrated communications at Premier, a company that works with about 4,200 hospitals and cancer clinics nationwide to negotiate discounts on drugs and supplies, only 38% of ifosfamide and only two thirds of cisplatin orders have been filled.

In 2023, a shortage of carboplatin and cisplatin sparked similar concerns about chemotherapy drug access. Researchers estimated that 1,000 patients were affected by the 2023 shortages, though the situation did not lead to an increase in cancer deaths. To learn more about the 2023 drug shortages, read "1 in 10 Cancer Patients Has Been Impacted by Nation's Drug Shortages With Significant Delays to Cancer Care" and "Managing the Cancer Drug Shortage Remains a Moving Target and Impacts Clinical Trials."

As they did three years ago, advocates are calling for federal intervention. On May 13, the National Comprehensive Cancer Network released a statement cosigned by several leading cancer organizations asking for increased transparency across the drug supply chain, stronger incentives for manufacturers to invest in high-quality, redundant supply systems and a stabilized generic drug market. The statement reads in part:

"This crisis requires comprehensive and coordinated action. Pharmaceutical manufacturers, healthcare providers and government stakeholders must work together to find sustainable solutions. We urge Congress and the Administration to prioritize targeted policy interventions that address supply chain vulnerabilities and promote a more resilient and reliable drug supply."

To learn more about chemotherapy and chemotherapy meds, visit Cancer Health's Cancer Basics on Chemotherapy.

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