What is extravasation?
Chemotherapy is given through a needle or catheter placed in a vein in your arm or through an implanted port in your chest. Extravasation happens if a chemotherapy drug leaks out of the vein or catheter into the tissue around the skin during infusion. The drug may cause skin irritation, redness, swelling, blisters, or wounds that are difficult to heal.

Extravasation may happen if the needle or catheter in your arm slips out of the vein, or if the needle in your port slips out. Sometimes it can happen even when the needle remains in place.

Is extravasation harmful?
Some chemotherapy drugs can damage the skin and tissue around it. The amount of drug that leaks, the drug’s concentration, and intervening early all affect how harmful it can be.

Some drugs called irritants can cause redness, tenderness, itching, and swelling. Other drugs called vesicants can be more harmful to tissue. They cause more severe damage such as blistering or a wound that is difficult to heal.

What are the signs of extravasation?
The following symptoms at or near the IV site may be signs of extravasation:
- Pain, burning, or stinging
- Redness
- Swelling
- Changes to the appearance of your skin
- Discomfort of any kind

What can I do?
Tell your nurse right away if you have any of the signs listed above during your infusion.
If you have any of these signs after leaving your chemotherapy treatment, call your doctor right away.