

PATIENT INFORMATION: RITUXIMAB

*Renal Vasculitis Service
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh*

Benefits of rituximab

Your doctor has recommended that you are treated with rituximab (for which the brand names are “Mabthera” or “Truxima”). This medicine is designed to target your immune system. If your immune system is over-active and causing disease then rituximab can help by dampening this down. Rituximab can be used to treat vasculitis, rheumatoid arthritis, some blood cancers and a number of kidney diseases.

How it is given

Rituximab can be given as a single dose or as two doses about two weeks apart. It is given as a drip treatment into a vein.

Risks of rituximab

Certain people should not be treated with rituximab, unless in exceptional circumstances. This includes women who are pregnant or breastfeeding because rituximab may harm the baby. Please let your kidney or vasculitis doctor know if you think you might be pregnant. We advise that all women of childbearing age should use highly-effective contraception (such as the Mirena coil, implant or sterilisation) for 12 months after treatment with rituximab.

Before you start this medication, we will talk to you about the possible side effects. Most patients suffer no side effects or only minor side effects with rituximab. We have included the most important risks in this information sheet; for a more complete list please consult the information sheet at <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/files/pil.8878.pdf>.

Side effects of rituximab fall into two groups: infusion-related side effects – that occur during the drip treatment itself or within a few hours afterwards – and late side effects, which may occur after weeks, months or years.

1. Infusion-related ‘allergic-type’ side effects

You will be given an antihistamine, paracetamol and steroid treatment immediately prior to receiving rituximab, in order to minimise the chance of an ‘allergic-type’ reaction. If you have a reaction it can usually be treated by slowing or stopping the drip until you feel better, at which point the drip can usually be re-started. You will be monitored closely during your treatment, but it is very important to tell your nurse or doctor if you feel unwell or have any of the following:

- flu-like symptoms, such as headache, feeling flushed, fever, chills, or dizziness
- nausea or sickness
- red, warm and itchy bumps on the skin (like nettle rash)
- swollen lips, tongue or throat; wheezing, a cough or breathlessness
- pain in your back or tummy
- a tight chest or chest pain.

Sometimes an infusion-related reaction can happen a few hours after treatment. If you develop these symptoms or feel unwell after you get home, contact ward 206 straight away for advice (0131 242 2061).

2. Late side effects

Infection. Rituximab suppresses the body's immune system. This means that you are more vulnerable to infections and this is likely to be the case for around a year after treatment with rituximab. We will prescribe you a daily antibiotic to reduce this risk. If you are worried that you might have an infection at any time in the year after receiving rituximab, then please seek medical advice straight away.

You should ensure that you are up to date with the influenza ('flu') and pneumococcal ('pneumonia') vaccinations. However, you should avoid any 'live' vaccines (such as the shingles vaccine) as these may be dangerous. Before receiving any vaccination, it would be sensible to discuss this first with your kidney or vasculitis doctor.

Sometimes rituximab may have an effect on your antibody levels or blood counts that would require extra blood tests or extra treatments.

Reactivation of previous hepatitis B infection. If you have previously been exposed to the hepatitis B virus then rituximab may cause this to reactivate.

Viral infections of the brain. A very small number of patients who have been treated with rituximab have developed a serious viral infection of the brain (called 'Progressive Multifocal Leukoencephalopathy'). For patients who don't have blood cancer, the risk is thought to be very low – so that around 5 in 100,000 patients (0.005 %) would develop this. The infection causes damage to the brain and may lead to disability or death. You should seek immediate medical attention if you experience any of the following symptoms in the years after treatment with rituximab:

- Fever, persistent cough, weight loss or listlessness
- Confusion, memory loss or problems thinking
- Loss of balance or a change in the way you walk or talk
- Decreased strength or weakness on one side of the body
- Blurred or loss of vision

Risk of cancer. Increased rates of cancer have not been reported in patients who have been treated with rituximab. However, any treatment used to suppress the immune system might cause a small increased risk of cancer in later life.

I acknowledge that I have received the above information about rituximab.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Name of Doctor:

Signature of Doctor:

Date: