Patient Information

NHS
Great Western Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Rituximab Rapid Rate Infusion

What is Rituximab?

Rituximab is a drug used to treat a number of haematological conditions including Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL) and Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia (CLL).

It belongs to a class of drugs known as monoclonal antibodies. It attaches specifically to a protein that is found on the surface of white blood cells, enabling your immune system to target and kills these cells.

Infusion-related reactions can occur when rituximab is being given. These reactions are often mild, but they can be severe.

To prevent potentially serious infusion reactions, your first rituximab infusion will be given slowly over 4 to 6 hours to monitor for adverse reactions. If this first infusion goes well, with no serious reaction, the manufacturer recommends the second and subsequent infusion to be given over 2.5 to 3 hours.

We will also give you paracetamol, an antihistamine and steroids before each infusion, to decrease the likelihood of infusion-related reactions.

What is a rapid rate infusion?

Studies and clinical experiences have shown that the second and subsequent infusion can be given safely over 1.5 hours instead of 2.5 to 3 hours. This is referred to as rituximab rapid rate infusion.

Patient Information

Rituximab Rapid Rate Infusion

The rituximab rapid rate infusion is not described in the manufacturer product license but regularly used in clinical practice. This means it is an unlicensed use of the medicine.
We can give you a leaflet called 'Unlicensed' and 'Off-label' medicines - Information for patients, parents and carers

Having the rituximab rapid rate infusion will reduce the time you need to stay on the chemotherapy unit for your infusions.

Who is eligible for rituximab rapid rate infusion?

Rituximab rapid rate infusion may be offered if you meet all the following criteria:

- You did not have any infusion-related reaction with first full dose of rituximab infusions. For example, headache, rash, flushing, chest tightness or short of breath that required interruption of infusion.
- You have received first full dose for NHL and CLL respectively.
- You do not have any pre-existing heart or lung problems.
- You do not have a high number of cancer cells in your body.

If you do not meet the criteria for rapid rate infusion, or you do not wish to receive your infusion in this way, you will still be able to receive rituximab at the standard rate over 2.5 to 3 hours.

If you are eligible for rituximab rapid rate infusion, you will be asked to complete a patient agreement form for the unlicensed rapid rate infusion.

Patient information

Rituximab Rapid Rate Infusion

What are the risks of having rapid rate infusion?

All rituximab infusions have a risk of infusion-related reactions, although the risk is lower if you have had no issues with your most recent infusion. If you notice any headache, rash, flushing, chest tightness, short of breath, chills or other unusual symptoms during your rituximab infusion, or following completion of the infusion, you should let your chemotherapy nurse know straight away.

What to expect during a rapid rate infusion of rituximab

When you arrive, your chemotherapy nurse will complete a chemotherapy assessment with you. They will also carry out certain checks, such as taking your temperature and measuring your blood pressure. They will put a needle, called a cannula, into your arm. This will be used to give you the infusion.

An hour before your rituximab infusion, your chemotherapy nurse will give you medications to prevent infusion-related reactions

Rituximab is prepared in 500 ml sodium chloride 0.9%.

- The first one-fifth (100ml) will be given over 30 minutes
- The remaining infusion (400ml) will be given over 60 minutes (total infusion time 90 minutes).

Your chemotherapy nurse will check you are well during the infusion.

When the first rapid rate infusion is complete, you will be monitored by your chemotherapy nurse for an additional 30 minutes.

Patient Information

Rituximab Rapid Rate Infusion

If you do not have any infusion-related symptoms, your chemotherapy nurse will remove the cannula and you will be able to leave the chemotherapy unit.

Further Information

You can obtain further information from

- Your haematology doctor (Tel:01793 605005)
- Specialist haematology nurse (Tel: 01793 604341)
- Specialist cancer pharmacists
- Chemotherapy nurses

They will be happy to answer any other questions you may have.

This leaflet is adapted from
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

From 1st January 2019 smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net

Document Control
Division: Diagnostic & Outpatients
Department: Pharmacy
Approved Date: 23 April 2020
Next Review Date: May 2023
Document Number: D&O - PIL0172