

Rituximab for Interstitial Lung Diseases

Your treating physician has discussed the use of Rituximab with you. In this leaflet, you will find information about the effects and use of this medication. You will also read what to do if you experience side effects. This leaflet is not a substitute for the official package insert. If you have any questions after reading this leaflet, you can ask your treating physician and/or nurse specialist.

How does Rituximab work?

Rituximab is a medication that belongs to the group of 'monoclonal antibodies'. These are proteins that resemble the natural antibodies of our immune system. Rituximab temporarily disables certain cells of our immune system, namely the B-cells. The rest of the immune system remains intact. After about 6 months, the number of B-cells recovers and Rituximab may be administered again if necessary.

How and where is Rituximab administered?

Rituximab is administered via an infusion at the day treatment unit in Amsterdam UMC, location VUmc. Usually, the infusion is given twice, with an interval of 2 weeks.

Repetition of the infusion after 6 - 12 months depends on the course of the disease and is determined by your doctor.

Start procedure

Before starting treatment with Rituximab, it is checked whether you can safely undergo the treatment. For example, it is checked for severe heart failure, problems with your immune system, and whether you may be infected with (latent) infectious diseases such as hepatitis B and C, HIV, and tuberculosis.

Before each infusion, you will be given medication to prevent side effects as much as possible. After each infusion, you will remain under observation in the hospital for at least one hour.

What are the side effects of Rituximab?

The most common side effects occur during or shortly after the infusion, in any case within 24 hours. This happens especially during the first administrations.

Symptoms may include:

- headache
- fever
- nausea
- low blood pressure
- chills
- rapid heartbeat

- skin rash
- itching
- fatigue

Because Rituximab suppresses the immune system, there is a slightly increased risk of infections. These are usually mild to moderate, sometimes severe. Infections that may occur include: upper respiratory tract infections (cold, sore throat), lower respiratory tract infections (bronchitis), viral infections (such as herpes), and urinary tract infections.

Contact your doctor or nurse specialist if you have symptoms of an infection and/or a temperature above 38.5°C.

Vaccinations

If you are being treated with Rituximab, 'live attenuated' vaccines are not safe. Other vaccinations (such as flu or corona) are safe, but may be less effective than normal.

Note: If you did not receive all vaccinations according to the national vaccination program as a child, or if you need specific vaccinations for a future trip abroad, discuss this with your pulmonologist.

When should you not use Rituximab?

If there are signs of an infection, such as fever, it is best to contact the outpatient clinic. The treatment may need to be postponed.

If you are going to have surgery, consultation with your pulmonologist is necessary. Sometimes, for a planned operation, Rituximab treatment must be postponed until after the procedure.

If you wish to have children or are (unexpectedly) pregnant, tell your doctor. Your doctor will then decide together with you what is best regarding your medication use if necessary. It is not known whether Rituximab affects fertility. There is little known about the influence of Rituximab on pregnancy. Therefore, avoid using Rituximab during pregnancy.

It is not known whether Rituximab passes into breast milk. Discuss with your doctor whether you can continue Rituximab if you are breastfeeding.

Can I use alcohol in combination with Rituximab?

There are no restrictions for this medication.

What is the influence of Rituximab on other medications?

Rituximab can be used simultaneously with other medications.

Do you have any questions?

If you have any questions or doubts, please contact the Pulmonary Diseases outpatient clinic using the contact details known to you.