

Information for patients, family and carers

Use of tocilizumab injection in the treatment of COVID-19

This information leaflet contains important information about the medicine tocilizumab (available as the brand names Actemra® and RoActemra®) that can be used to treat COVID-19.

What is the potential benefit of tocilizumab for COVID-19?

If you get very sick, your immune system can make too many 'cytokines'. This makes your body inflamed and makes it harder to fight viruses like COVID-19. Taking the medicine *tocilizumab* will make your body less inflamed from cytokines and help you to get better.

Studies found that when people were very sick from COVID-19, taking tocilizumab reduced:

- how long they had to stay in hospital
- their chances of needing a machine to help them breathe (a 'ventilator').
- their chances of dying.

What should be considered when using tocilizumab in COVID-19?

Tocilizumab is used to treat inflammatory conditions (like rheumatoid arthritis) and studies have been done on its short-term and long-term safety.

In Australia, tocilizumab has provisional (temporary) approval to treat severe COVID-19 as it is a recent treatment. *Short-term* safety data shows it is safe to use. *Long-term* safety data is still being collected. It is important that patients and their carers understand when and why tocilizumab may be useful. Your doctor will provide more information about how well it works and how safe it is for your circumstances.

As this is still a new treatment for COVID-19, you should talk to your doctor if you have any questions or concerns. It is important to feel comfortable with the answers before giving your permission to use tocilizumab. You can always change your mind and take back permission at any time.

What should your doctor know before tocilizumab is used in COVID-19?

It is important for your doctor to know your medical history before giving you tocilizumab. They may ask about:

- any past allergic reactions to medicines
- any stomach problems e.g. ulcers, diverticulitis, perforations, surgeries
- any liver, heart or blood pressure problems
- any current or past infections or viruses e.g. HIV or AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis
- any medical problems that make you more likely to get infections e.g. diabetes, cancers, if you have lower immunity from any other diseases (immunocompromised)
- if you may be pregnant, breastfeeding or are planning to have a baby soon
- all medicines you take including prescription medicines, vitamins, herbal or naturopathic medicines.

How is tocilizumab given?

Tocilizumab is given by a needle into a vein (intravenous administration) by a doctor or nurse. The infusion takes about one hour and will be given in a hospital setting.

© 2022 – NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission. This document is copyright and remains the property of NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and Clinical Excellence Commission.

This document may be freely accessed for information purposes, but cannot be re-used, in whole or part, for medical, academic or commercial purposes, modified and or otherwise adapted without the written permission of both the NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission. Subject to any copyright approval being granted by both the NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission, the following copyright attribution is to be made on any document generated: © NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and Clinical Excellence Commission. Contact nswfaq@stvincents.com.au and cec-corp.gov@health.nsw.gov.au to make a copyright request.

What are the side effects of tocilizumab?

You may not get any side effects when taking tocilizumab. The most common side effects reported by patients with COVID-19 are listed in the table below. There is also a chance you may get unknown side effects.

Most common side effects	What to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constipation• Diarrhoea• Feeling like vomiting (nausea)• Burning when urinating or urinating more often (urinary tract infections)• Feeling anxious• Difficulty getting to sleep, or staying asleep (insomnia)	Tell your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if this happens as they can help
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher blood pressure	Your nurse will check your blood pressure regularly. If it gets too high and you need medicine, they will let you and your doctor know.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low white blood cells and platelets• Changes in levels of liver enzymes	Your doctor will watch for these side effects by doing regular blood tests and let you know if they need to be treated.
Less common side effects	What to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fever, sweating/chills, new symptoms of a flu or infection• Stomach pain, vomiting or bloating• Allergic reactions like a rash or sudden breathing problem (anaphylaxis)	These side effects are less common but could be signs of more serious problems. If you feel any of these, tell your doctor or nurse straight away.

Please note: This is not a complete list of side effects. The [Consumer Medicine Information \(CMI\) factsheet](#) has a full list, or your doctor, pharmacist or nurse can speak with you about this. Side effects can be reported to your doctor and you can also report them to the [Therapeutic Goods Administration](#).

Are there special precautions with tocilizumab treatment?

Use with other medicines

Tocilizumab may interact with some other medicines. It is important to tell the hospital team looking after you about all medications you normally take or have recently taken. This includes over the counter and complementary medicines e.g., vitamins, minerals, herbal or naturopathic medicines that you are taking or have recently taken. The doctor and pharmacist will check for any medicine interactions before tocilizumab is started.

Vaccinations

After taking tocilizumab, there is a risk of getting infections for some time afterwards. If you are supposed to have any vaccinations soon, let your doctor know and they will tell you when it is safe to take them.

© 2022 – NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission. This document is copyright and remains the property of NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and Clinical Excellence Commission.

This document may be freely accessed for information purposes, but cannot be re-used, in whole or part, for medical, academic or commercial purposes, modified and or otherwise adapted without the written permission of both the NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission. Subject to any copyright approval being granted by both the NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission, the following copyright attribution is to be made on any document generated: © NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and Clinical Excellence Commission. Contact nswtaq@stvincents.com.au and cec-corp.gov@health.nsw.gov.au to make a copyright request.

Information for patients, family and carers

Use of tocilizumab injection in the treatment of COVID-19

Fertility, pregnancy and breastfeeding

- Tocilizumab is generally avoided in pregnancy, but if you or your baby are at high risk of becoming severely unwell or dying from COVID-19, your doctor may recommend taking it.
- It is not known whether tocilizumab passes into breast milk. You should not breastfeed while you are treated with tocilizumab. Ask your doctor when it is safe to breastfeed again.
- It is not known if tocilizumab affects fertility (ability to have a baby). Women who can have children should discuss the need for contraception with their doctor after treatment with tocilizumab.
- Advice may change if new evidence comes out. Speak with your doctor or pharmacist for the most recent advice on tocilizumab use in pregnant and breastfeeding women with COVID-19.

More information about tocilizumab

- [Consumer Medicines Information: Actemra® \(tocilizumab\)](#)
- Call the [NPS Medicines Line](#) – 1300 633 424

© 2022 – NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission. This document is copyright and remains the property of NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and Clinical Excellence Commission.

This document may be freely accessed for information purposes, but cannot be re-used, in whole or part, for medical, academic or commercial purposes, modified and or otherwise adapted without the written permission of both the NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission. Subject to any copyright approval being granted by both the NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and the Clinical Excellence Commission, the following copyright attribution is to be made on any document generated: © NSW Therapeutic Advisory Group Inc and Clinical Excellence Commission. Contact nswtag@stvincents.com.au and cec-corpqov@health.nsw.gov.au to make a copyright request.