

Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIG) Treatment for Immune Thrombocytopenia (ITP)

What is ITP?

Immune Thrombocytopenia (ITP) is a condition where the immune system attacks and destroys platelets, the blood cells that help stop bleeding. Low platelet counts can increase the risk of bruising and bleeding, which may be serious.

What is IVIG?

Intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) is a blood product made from donated human antibodies. Antibodies are proteins that normally help fight infection.

In ITP, IVIG works by temporarily “blocking” the immune system’s destruction of platelets. This allows platelet counts to rise, often within a few days.

IVIG does not cure ITP, but it can provide a quick increase in platelet counts that can last for days to weeks.

Why is IVIG used in ITP?

IVIG may be used when:

- A rapid increase in platelet count is needed (e.g., before surgery or a procedure)
- There is significant bleeding or a high risk of bleeding
- Steroids are not working quickly enough or cannot be used
- ITP occurs during pregnancy and fast platelet support is required

IVIG can:

- Increase platelet counts, often within 24-48 hours
- Reduce bleeding symptoms
- Provide temporary protection while other treatments take effect
- Be used safely during pregnancy

How is IVIG given?

IVIG is given through an IV (intravenous infusion), meaning it goes directly into a vein. It is usually administered in a hospital or infusion clinic setting. Common treatment schedules include:

- A single dose given over one day, or
- Multiple doses given over consecutive days (depending on your doctor's recommendations)

The dose is calculated based on your body weight.

What to expect during treatment

The infusion typically takes 2 to 5 hours, and you will be monitored closely throughout.

Common side effects during or shortly after the infusion:

- Headache
- Flushing or rash
- Fever or chills
- Muscle or joint aches
- Nausea
- Tiredness or fatigue

Healthcare staff can slow your infusion or give you medicines to help with these symptoms

Less common but serious side effects include:

- Severe headache with stiff neck or light sensitivity that suggests irritation of the lining of the brain
- Blood clots
- Kidney problems
- Severe allergic reaction

Before starting IVIG, your doctor may request a blood test to check your kidney function, IgA levels, and blood type and antibodies.

Note: People with IgA deficiency may have a higher risk of serious allergic reactions. Tell your doctor if you know you have this condition.

After treatment

IVIG effects are temporary, and platelet counts may fall again after days to weeks.

- You will have regular blood tests to monitor your platelet levels
- Further treatment may be needed depending on your response

Important considerations

- **Hydration:** Hydrating well the day before, of, and after your infusion can help minimize side effects
- **Vaccinations:** It is important for your healthcare team to know that you are on IVIG so they can assess any impact on your vaccinations
- **Driving:** You may feel fatigued or have a headache after your infusion. Arrange for someone to drive you home, if needed.
- **Pregnancy and breastfeeding:** IVIG is commonly used in pregnancy for ITP and is generally considered safe. Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or breastfeeding
- **Infection risk:** IVIG is made from human plasma and is carefully screened for known viruses. The risk of infection from IVIG is very low; however, tell your doctor if you develop fever, sore throat, or other signs of infection after your infusion
- **Fair PharmaCare:** IVIG is usually given in a hospital or clinic and is covered through the hospital.
If you have questions about coverage, contact Health Insurance BC at 1-800-663-7100 or visit my.gov.bc.ca/ahdc/msp-eligibility

When to contact your healthcare provider

Get medical help right away if you have:

- Severe allergic reaction (trouble breathing, swelling of face or throat)
- Severe headache, stiff neck, or sensitivity to light
- High fever or persistent chills during or after your infusion
- Chest pain, leg pain, or sudden swelling
- Unusual bruising or bleeding
- Decreased urination or dark-coloured urine
- Ongoing fatigue or weakness

Report any additional problems to your healthcare provider.

This information is meant to support, not replace, the advice provided by your doctor and healthcare team. It may not include all possible side effects or instructions. If you have questions or would like more information, please speak with your healthcare provider.