

Rituximab 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 rituximab?

Rituximab is a medication that helps treat ITP by calming the immune system. It lowers the harmful antibodies that attack platelets. It works by targeting B cells, a type of white blood cell that makes these antibodies.

Why is rituximab used in ITP?

Rituximab may be used when:

- Steroids or IVIG do not work well enough
- ITP returns after initial treatment
- You have another condition associated with ITP that may benefit from rituximab

Rituximab can:

- Increase platelet counts
- Reduce bleeding symptoms
- Lower the need for steroids or other treatments
- Help some people achieve longer-term remission

How is rituximab given?

Rituximab is given through an IV, which means it goes directly into a vein. Common treatment schedules include:

- Once a week for 4 weeks (4 doses), or
- Other schedules depending on your doctor's recommendations

What to expect during treatment

- Each infusion takes several hours, and you will be monitored closely for reactions
- Common side effects include fever, chills, nausea, rash, headache, and tiredness
- Serious side effects are uncommon but can include infections or allergic reactions

A very rare but serious side effect is progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML), caused by the JC virus. It can affect thinking, balance, speech, or vision. This side effect is extremely rare.

Before starting rituximab, you will have blood tests to check for infections like hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. People who can become pregnant may need a pregnancy test.

After treatment

- You will have regular blood tests to monitor platelet counts and overall health
- If platelet counts fall again, your doctor may suggest additional treatment

Important considerations

- **Vaccinations:** It is important for your healthcare team to know that you are on rituximab so they can assess any impact on your vaccinations
- **Infection risk:** Rituximab can increase the chance of infections. Tell your doctor if you develop fever, sore throat, or other signs of infection
- **Pregnancy and breastfeeding:** Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, planning pregnancy, or breastfeeding
- **Fair PharmaCare:** You must be registered with BC Fair PharmaCare to get coverage for rituximab as an outpatient.
For more information, 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:

- Trouble breathing or swelling of the face or throat
- Fever, chills, or lasting cough
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Severe headache or neurological symptoms
- 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.