Ganciclovir (Systemic)

This information from Lexicomp® explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it’s used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

Brand Names: US
Cytovene

Brand Names: Canada
Cytovene

Warning

- Very bad and sometimes life-threatening blood and bone marrow problems like anemia, low platelet counts, or low white blood cell counts have happened with this drug. Change in dose or even stopping the drug may be needed if any of these side effects happen. Talk with the doctor.

- This drug has caused fertility problems in animals and some humans. Fertility problems may lead to not being able get pregnant or father a child. This may go back to normal but sometimes it may not. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.

- In animals, this drug has caused harm to unborn babies and cancer. This drug may have the same effects in humans. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat a viral infection of the eyes in people with immune system problems.

- It is used to prevent cytomegalovirus (CMV) disease after organ transplant.

- It may be given to your child for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.
What do I need to tell the doctor BEFORE my child takes this drug?

- If your child has an allergy to this drug or any part of this drug.
- If your child is allergic to any drugs like this one or any other drugs, foods, or other substances. Tell the doctor about the allergy and what signs your child had, like rash; hives; itching; shortness of breath; wheezing; cough; swelling of face, lips, tongue, or throat; or any other signs.
- If your child has any of these health problems: Low white blood cell count, low platelet count, or low red blood cell count.
- If your child is taking imipenem-cilastatin.

If your child is breast-feeding a baby:

- Be sure your child does not breast-feed a baby while taking this drug.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell the doctor and pharmacist about all of your child’s drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for your child to take this drug with all of his/her drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug your child takes without checking with the doctor.

What are some things I need to know or do while my child takes this drug?

For all uses of this drug:

- Tell all of your child’s health care providers that your child is taking this drug. This includes your child’s doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Have your child avoid tasks or actions that call for alertness until you see how this drug affects your child. These are things like riding a bike, playing sports, or using items such as scissors, lawnmowers, electric scooters, toy cars, or motorized vehicles.
- Have your child’s blood work checked often. Talk with your child’s doctor.
- Your child may have more chance of getting infections. Have your child wash
hands often. Avoid crowds and people with infections, colds, or flu.

- Your child may bleed more easily. Make sure your child is careful and avoids injury. Be sure your child has a soft toothbrush.

- Holes in the GI (gastrointestinal) tract, organ failure, pancreas irritation (pancreatitis), and a very bad blood infection (sepsis) have happened with this drug. These health problems could be deadly. Talk with the doctor.

- This drug is not approved for use in children. However, the doctor may decide the benefits of taking this drug outweigh the risks. If your child has been given this drug, ask the doctor for information about the benefits and risks. Talk with the doctor if you have questions about giving this drug to your child.

- If your child is of childbearing age, a pregnancy test will need to be done before starting this drug to make sure she is not pregnant.

**If your child is or may be sexually active:**

- Have your child use birth control to prevent pregnancy while taking this drug and for 1 month after stopping this drug.

- If your child is a male and has sex with a female who could get pregnant, they must prevent pregnancy during treatment and for 3 months after his last dose. They must use a condom.

- If your child is a male and his sex partner gets pregnant while he takes this drug or within 3 months after his last dose, call the doctor right away.

**If your child is pregnant:**

- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if your child takes it during pregnancy.

- If your child gets pregnant while taking this drug or within 1 month after the last dose, call the doctor right away.

**For CMV infections of the eye:**

- This drug is not a cure for CMV infections of the eye. Be sure your child stays under the care of the doctor.
Get your child an eye exam as you have been told by the doctor.

**What are some side effects that I need to call my child’s doctor about right away?**

**WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your child’s doctor or get medical help right away if your child has any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.

- Signs of infection like fever, chills, very bad sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, more sputum or change in color of sputum, pain with passing urine, mouth sores, or wound that will not heal.

- Signs of bleeding like throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds; coughing up blood; blood in the urine; black, red, or tarry stools; bleeding from the gums; vaginal bleeding that is not normal; bruises without a reason or that get bigger; or any bleeding that is very bad or that you cannot stop.

- Signs of high or low blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.

- Signs of kidney problems like unable to pass urine, change in how much urine is passed, blood in the urine, or a big weight gain.

- Signs of a pancreas problem (pancreatitis) like very bad stomach pain, very bad back pain, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.

- Feeling very tired or weak.

- Sweating a lot.

- Feeling confused.

- Anxiety.

- Low mood (depression).

- Change in how your child acts.
- Seizures.
- Shakiness.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Very bad belly pain.
- Swollen belly.
- Change in eyesight, eye pain, or very bad eye irritation.
- Chest pain.
- Swelling.
- Shortness of breath.
- Ringing in ears.
- Hearing loss.
- A heartbeat that does not feel normal.
- Pain and irritation where this drug goes into the body.

**What are some other side effects of this drug?**

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your child’s doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother your child or do not go away:

- Dizziness.
- Feeling sleepy.
- Not hungry.
- Upset stomach or throwing up.
- Diarrhea.
- Feeling tired or weak.
- Headache.
- Belly pain.
- Gas.
- Constipation.
• Strange or odd dreams.
• Dry mouth.
• Not able to sleep.
• Hair loss.
• Dry skin.
• Change in taste.
• Weight loss.
• Back pain.
• Muscle or joint pain.
• Muscle spasm.
• Leg cramps.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your child’s doctor. Call your child’s doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

**How is this drug best given?**

Give this drug as ordered by your child’s doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

• It is given as an infusion into a vein over a period of time.
• Have your child drink lots of noncaffeine liquids unless told to drink less liquid by your child’s doctor.

**What do I do if my child misses a dose?**

• Call your child’s doctor to find out what to do.

**How do I store and/or throw out this drug?**

• If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your child’s doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.
General drug facts

- If your child’s symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your child’s doctor.

- Do not share your child’s drug with others and do not give anyone else’s drug to your child.

- Keep a list of all your child’s drugs (prescription, natural products, vitamins, OTC) with you. Give this list to your child’s doctor.

- Talk with your child’s doctor before giving your child any new drug, including prescription or OTC, natural products, or vitamins.

- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.

- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your child’s doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.

- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

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This information should not be used to decide whether or not to take this medicine or any other medicine. Only the healthcare provider has the knowledge and training to decide which medicines are right for a specific patient. This information does not endorse any medicine as safe, effective, or approved for treating any patient or health condition. This is only a brief summary of general information about this medicine. It does NOT include all information about the possible uses, directions, warnings, precautions, interactions, adverse effects, or risks that may apply to this medicine. This information is not specific medical advice and does not replace information you receive from the healthcare provider. You must talk with the healthcare
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For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.