PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Gemcitabine

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

Infugem [DSC]

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat cancer.

What do I need to tell the doctor BEFORE my child takes this drug?

- If your child is allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell the doctor about the allergy and what signs your child had.
- If your child is getting radiation.

If your child is breast-feeding a baby:

- Be sure your child does not breast-feed a baby while taking this drug and for 1 week after the last dose.

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 to give this drug with all of your child's other 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?

- 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 blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Talk with the doctor.
- If your child has an upset stomach or diarrhea, is throwing up, or decreased appetite, talk with the doctor. There may be ways to lower these side effects.
- Your child may have more chance of getting

infections. Have your child wash hands often. Avoid crowds and people with infections, colds, or flu.

- Talk with the doctor before your child gets any vaccines. Use of some vaccines with this drug may either raise the chance of very bad infection or make the vaccine not work as well.
- Your child may bleed more easily. Make sure your child is careful and avoids injury. Be sure your child has a soft toothbrush.
- If your child has had or will be having radiation treatment, talk with the doctor. Worse side effects from radiation treatment have happened with this drug.
- This drug may affect being able to father a child. It is not known if this effect will go back to normal.
- If your child is of childbearing age, a pregnancy test will need to be done before starting this drug to make sure your child is not pregnant.

If your child is or may be sexually active:

- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if your child takes it during pregnancy.
- If your child or your child’s partner may become pregnant, birth control must be used while taking this

drug and for some time after the last dose. Ask the doctor how long birth control must be used. If your child or your child's partner gets pregnant, call the doctor right away.

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 or coughing up blood; vomit that looks like coffee grounds; blood in

the urine; black, red, or tarry stools; bleeding from the gums; abnormal vaginal bleeding; bruises without a cause or that get bigger; or bleeding you cannot stop.

- Signs of high blood sugar like confusion, feeling sleepy, unusual thirst or hunger, passing urine more often, flushing, fast breathing, or breath that smells like fruit.
- Signs of electrolyte problems like mood changes; confusion; muscle pain, cramps, or spasms; weakness; shakiness; change in balance; an abnormal heartbeat; seizures; loss of appetite; or severe upset stomach or throwing up.
- Very bad dizziness or passing out.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Swelling.
- Liver problems have happened with this drug. Sometimes, these have been deadly. Call the doctor right away if your child has signs of liver problems like dark urine, tiredness, decreased appetite, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Lung problems have happened with this drug.

Sometimes, this has been deadly. Lung problems can happen up to 2 weeks after this drug is stopped. Call the doctor right away if your child has shortness of breath or other trouble breathing.

- A severe and sometimes deadly brain problem called posterior reversible encephalopathy syndrome (PRES) has happened with this drug. Call the doctor right away if your child has signs like feeling confused, lowered alertness, change in eyesight like loss of eyesight, seizures, or severe headache.
- A blood problem called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS) has happened with this drug. Severe kidney problems have happened and sometimes dialysis was needed. Sometimes, these kidney problems have been deadly. Call your child’s doctor right away if your child feels very tired or weak or has any bruising or bleeding, change in how much urine is passed, confusion, dark urine, fast heartbeat, fever, mood or behavior changes, pale skin, seizures, shortness of breath, stomach pain, or throwing up.
- Capillary leak syndrome (CLS) is a very bad health problem that has happened with this drug. Sometimes, CLS can be deadly. Tell your child’s doctor right away if your child gets signs of CLS like change in how much urine is passed; not able to pass

urine; blood in the urine; a fast or abnormal heartbeat; chest pain or pressure; dizziness or passing out; shortness of breath; a big weight gain; swelling; throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds; or if your child has black, tarry, or bloody stools.

- This drug may irritate the vein. If the drug leaks from the vein, it may also cause irritation around that area. Tell your child's nurse if your child has any redness, burning, pain, swelling, or leaking of fluid where the drug is going into your child's 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:

- Hair loss.
- Constipation, diarrhea, upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.
- Flu-like signs. These include headache, weakness, fever, shakes, aches, pains, and sweating.
- Mouth irritation or mouth sores.
- Feeling tired or weak.

- Feeling sleepy.

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.

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 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.

Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

Last Reviewed Date

2022-10-11

Copyright

© 2024 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Gemcitabine - Last updated on December 12, 2022
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center