



Vincristine: information for families

This information sheet from Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) explains what vincristine is, how it is given and some of the possible side effects. Each person reacts differently to medicines, so your child will not necessarily suffer from every side effect mentioned. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with any information provided by the manufacturer. However, please note that this information sheet explains about the use of vincristine in children and young people so may differ from the manufacturer's information.

What is vincristine?

Vincristine is a chemotherapy medicine that is used to treat certain types of cancer. It is also used to treat other conditions.

How is it given?

It is given by slow injection into a vein (intravenously or IV) through a cannula, central venous catheter or implantable port.

What are the side effects?

Constipation

Your child may become constipated and have tummy pain. This can generally be helped by drinking lots of fluids and eating a high-fibre diet. Sometimes the doctor may prescribe laxative medicines to stimulate your child's bowel function.

Nausea and vomiting

Anti-sickness drugs can be given to reduce or prevent these symptoms. Please tell your doctor or nurse if your child's sickness is very bad or lasts for more than a few days.

Numbness, tingling or aches and pains

This can happen because of the effect of vincristine on your child's nervous system. Your child may complain of aches and pains in their legs. Please tell your doctor if you notice any of these symptoms. These side effects are temporary and usually wear off a few months after treatment has finished.

Jaw pain

Sometimes vincristine may cause jaw pain or difficulty in swallowing. This is because of the effect of vincristine on the cranial nerve, which runs down the side of the face. These effects are temporary and usually wear off gradually once treatment is finished.

Hair loss

Your child may lose all of their hair or it may become thinner. This is temporary and their hair will grow back once the treatment has finished.

Discomfort on urination or urine retention

Your child may experience pain or discomfort on urination or difficulty in passing urine. Please tell the doctor or nurse if this occurs.

Interactions with other medicines

Some medicines can react with vincristine, altering how well it works. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving your child any other medicine, including medicines on prescription from your family doctor (GP), medicines bought from a pharmacy (chemist) or any herbal or complementary medicines.

Important

If vincristine leaks into the tissues underneath your child's skin, they can damage the tissue in this area. This is called extravasation.

- If given through a cannula and your child complains of stinging and burning around the cannula, please tell your doctor or nurse immediately.
- If given through a central venous catheter or implantable port and your child complains of pain around their chest or neck, please tell your doctor or nurse immediately.

Useful numbers

- GOSH switchboard 020 7405 9200
- Pharmacy medicines information 020 7829 8608 (Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm)

Disclaimer

Please read this information sheet from GOSH alongside the patient information leaflet (PIL) provided by the manufacturer. If you do not have a copy of the manufacturer's patient information leaflet please talk to your pharmacist. A few products do not have a marketing authorisation (licence) as a medicine and therefore there is no PIL.

For children in particular, there may be conflicts of information between the manufacturer's patient information leaflet (PIL) and guidance provided by GOSH and other healthcare providers. For example, some manufacturers may recommend, in the patient information leaflet, that a medicine is not given to children aged under 12 years. In most cases, this is because the manufacturer will recruit adults to clinical trials in the first instance and therefore the initial marketing authorisation (licence) only covers adults and older children.

For new medicines, the manufacturer then has to recruit children and newborns into trials (unless the medicine is not going to be used in children and newborns) and subsequently amend the PIL with the approved information. Older medicines may have been used effectively for many years in children without problems but the manufacturer has not been required to collect data and amend the licence. This does not mean that it is unsafe for children and young people to be prescribed such a medicine 'off-licence/off-label'. However, if you are concerned about any conflicts of information, please discuss with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.