

Tocilizumab to treat coronavirus (COVID-19)

This leaflet explains about the use of tocilizumab to treat coronavirus. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is tocilizumab and why do we use it for coronavirus?

Coronavirus pneumonia is often associated with lots of inflammation which is caused by your immune system. Tocilizumab is an immune-suppressing medication, which is often used to treat rheumatoid arthritis. Clinical trials have shown that one dose of tocilizumab is effective in reducing inflammation in patients who are severely unwell with coronavirus. It is mainly given to patients who are in intensive care, but sometimes is given to patients who are on regular wards.

Interleukin-6 (IL-6) is a protein in your blood that drives your immune response to coronavirus and can make you very ill. Tocilizumab works by blocking this protein. Clinical trials show that tocilizumab can reduce the time you spend in hospital and improve outcomes for patients who have been critically unwell with severe coronavirus.

What are the side effects?

Side effects can happen for up to 3 months after your dose of tocilizumab. Common side effects include colds, stomach pain, mouth ulcers, rashes, headache, dizziness, high blood pressure, headache, cough and breathlessness.

Uncommon side effects include diverticulitis (inflammation of the lower bowel), and gastritis (inflammation of the stomach). If you develop pain in your abdomen (tummy), especially if you are passing blood in your stool (poo), or have a fever (high temperature), you should seek medical attention. Some specific side effects are mentioned in more detail below.

Infection

Because this drug affects the immune system, you might be more likely to get infections, and your body might not fight infection so well. If you become unwell or think you are getting an infection, contact your GP or NHS 111 for advice. You **must** tell the healthcare professionals looking after you when you had tocilizumab. It is important because you might not show the usual signs of an infection (for example, you might not have a fever).

Signs of infection include:

- fever or chills
- severe weakness or fatigue
- sore throat
- burning or stinging when passing urine (pee)
- persistent cough
- difficulty breathing
- new rashes or skin blisters
- diarrhoea

Allergy

Most people who have an allergic reaction to tocilizumab will have it within 24 hours of their treatment. However, sometimes allergic reactions are delayed.

Signs of an allergic reaction include:

- itchy rash or hives
- difficulty breathing
- vomiting (being sick) and stomach pain
- swelling of the mouth, tongue or face, or fainting
- chest tightness or chest pain

Hepatotoxicity (liver damage)

Tocilizumab can cause liver damage. While you are in hospital we check for this by doing blood tests. Once you have gone home, if you notice a yellowing of your skin or eyes, if your urine becomes very dark, or if you become tired and confused, you should speak to your GP, NHS 111 or go to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) for assessment.

Vaccinations

You should not receive any live vaccines (such as MMR or yellow fever) for 3 months after your treatment. You can still receive your flu vaccine and coronavirus vaccination if offered.

Pregnancy

If you are a woman of child bearing age, you should avoid getting pregnant for 3 months after receiving tocilizumab.

Contact us

If you need more information, not available on the NHS website, please contact the clinical team who looked after you in hospital (details on your discharge paperwork).

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **web:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline, **tel:** 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm, **email:** mymedicines@gstt.nhs.uk

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service, **tel:** 020 7188 8801, **email:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk. To make a complaint, contact the complaints department, **tel:** 020 7188 3514, **email:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch, **tel:** 020 7188 8815, **email:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

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