

# Infliximab for immunotherapy related colitis

Information for patients



Leeds Cancer  
Centre

This patient information leaflet (PIL) is designed to provide information to those patients considering infliximab for immunotherapy related colitis. This leaflet is to be used in conjunction with information provided by your healthcare providers, who will be able to answer any further questions.

### **What is immunotherapy related colitis?**

Immunotherapy is used to treat different types of cancer. It works by increasing the activity of the immune system. The immune system is the body's defence system. It is usually responsible for helping us to fight infections or abnormal cells within the body. In this case, we are using the immune system to fight cancer cells.

Immunotherapy can affect normal cells as well as cancer cells. If the cells of the gastrointestinal tract are affected, this can lead to an inflammation of the bowel, a condition called colitis. Symptoms of colitis include diarrhoea, abdominal pain, weight loss, fever and vomiting.

### **How do we treat immunotherapy related colitis?**

You are likely to have already received investigations and treatment. There are a number of different treatments for immunotherapy related colitis depending on how severe your symptoms are.

First, your medical team will aim to rule out other causes for your bowel symptoms such as infection. They may recommend medicines such as loperamide to control symptoms of diarrhoea. More severe symptoms may mean your immunotherapy will need to be put on hold. Medications which reduce inflammation within the bowels are used.

These include steroids such as prednisolone and budesonide.

You are likely to have had a camera test to look at your bowel and take some biopsies. If your symptoms continue despite steroids, sometimes other medications are needed to reduce the inflammation in your bowels, such as infliximab.

## **What is infliximab?**

Infliximab belongs to a class of medicines called 'biologics'. These are therapies that are used commonly in inflammatory bowel conditions such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. They also work in colitis caused by immunotherapy. There is no evidence that infliximab stops the anti-cancer effect of the immunotherapy.

## **Before having infliximab**

Before infliximab can be given, the following checks will be carried out to make sure that it is safe for you to receive the medication:

- Medical history check, including symptoms of infection, current medication and allergies
- Vaccination history
- History of chickenpox and shingles, including any recent exposure

- Weight (used to calculate the dose)
- Screen for tuberculosis
- Screen for hepatitis
- Screen for HIV
- Pregnancy test (if applicable)

## How is infliximab given?

Infliximab is given in hospital via a drip directly into the vein over two hours. Following this you must remain in hospital for a further two hours in case you experience a side effect to the medicine.

Patients usually require two doses which are given two weeks apart. You may require more doses in the future if your symptoms persist.

## Side effects and monitoring

Infliximab is generally very well tolerated, with hundreds of doses given every month in Leeds. The most common side effects of infliximab include:

- Increased risk of infection
- Hypersensitivity reactions (like an allergy)
- Increased heart rate
- Increased/decreased blood pressure
- Headache
- Rash
- Nausea

- Dizziness- avoid driving and operating machinery

To reduce the risk of allergy-like reactions you will be given medication before infliximab is administered, these may include steroids and antihistamines.

During the two hours over which infliximab is given and for two hours after, a nurse will make the following observations every 30 minutes:

- Temperature
- Blood pressure
- Oxygen saturations
- Respiratory rate
- Pulse

## What to expect after infliximab is given

Once you have received the infliximab and completed your two hour monitoring period without any problems, you will be able to go home. If you experience a side effect, you may need some additional monitoring.

Once home, if you feel unwell, please call **0113 243 3144** and ask for the oncology bleep holder.

Follow-up appointments will be arranged by the medical team providing your care; at these appointments further doses of infliximab may be arranged. If so, these usually take place two weeks after the initial infusion and then after a further four to six weeks if necessary.

## Self-care recommendations

Infliximab can remain in the body for up to 6 months after an infusion is given. To help you stay safe during this period, the following self-care advice is recommended:

- Infliximab can make you more prone to catching infections; it is advisable to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- Be vigilant with food hygiene and ensure all foods are thoroughly cooked before consuming. Avoid raw eggs, pâté, undercooked meats and poultry, unpasteurised dairy and blue cheeses
- Avoid sun exposure where possible or take precautions to limit sun exposure e.g. wear a sunhat and use a high factor sunscreen. This is because infliximab increases the risk of skin reactions and developing skin cancer
- Ensure that health providers such as GPs are aware that you have had an infliximab infusion
- Avoid live vaccines
- Have the annual flu vaccine

## Local Support Services

### Leeds Cancer Support

Complementing care provided by your clinical team, offering access to information and a wide range of support, in a welcoming environment for all. We can be found in the information lounges in Bexley Wing and also in the purpose built Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre.

#### Contact numbers for Leeds Cancer Support

**Information Lounge Level -2 Radiotherapy Department**

Open from 8.00am - 6.00pm Tel: **(0113) 206 7603**

**Information Centre Level 1 Outpatients Department**

Open from 9.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: **(0113) 206 8816**

**Sir Robert Ogden Macmillan Centre**

Open from 10.00am - 4.00pm. Tel: **(0113) 206 6498**

*All the above services can be emailed on:*

**leedsth-tr.cancersupport@nhs.net**

### Maggie's Centre

A warm, welcoming place where you can meet people who are experiencing similar things to you. Next to the multi storey car park.

Open Monday to Friday 9.00 am - 5.00pm. Tel: **(0113) 427 8364**

**website: [www.maggiescentres.org](http://www.maggiescentres.org)**

### Macmillan Cancer Support

Freephone: **0808 808 0000** Open 8am to 8pm seven days a week.

A textphone service for deaf and hard of hearing people is also available. Textphone: **18001 0808 808 0000**

**website: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)**



## What did you think of your care?

Scan the QR code or visit [bit.ly/nhsleedsfft](https://bit.ly/nhsleedsfft)

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The printing of this leaflet has been  
funded by Leeds Hospitals Charity  
[leedshospitalscharity.org.uk](https://leedshospitalscharity.org.uk)



leeds hospitals charity

charity number: 1170369

© The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust • 2nd edition (Ver 1)  
Developed by: Megan Davies, Specialist Clinical Pharmacist  
Produced by: Medical Illustration Services  
MID code: 20230103\_002/MH

LN004971  
Publication date  
01/2023  
Review date  
01/2026