Cytarabine in the Treatment of Cancer

Cytarabine (Ara-C®, Cytosar®) is a medication used in the treatment of some cancers. This medication works by starving cancer cells of their essential cell nutrients.

Cytarabine is given into the vein (IV), under the skin (subQ injection), into the muscle (IM injection) or into the spinal fluid (intrathecal).

Your child’s doctor will give you a copy of the treatment protocol and this will include information on the medication dose and when it will be given.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS (unless otherwise instructed):

- Your child may receive eye drops before, during and after the infusion if receiving a high dose of cytarabine.
- You will be instructed on how to give your child cytarabine by subQ injection if prescribed to be given this way. (See "Medication Administration: Giving a Subcutaneous (SubQ) Injection" CARE CARD.)
- You will receive instructions if your child is to receive cytarabine at home.

SIDE EFFECTS:

The following side effects are common:

- Low white blood cell count – increasing your child’s risk of infection
- Low platelet count – increasing your child’s risk of bleeding
- Low red blood cell count – increasing your child’s risk of anemia
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Mouth sores
- Stomach ulcers
- Hair loss
- Headache (with intrathecal cytarabine)
- Fever
- "Flu-like" symptoms

The following side effects are less common, but can occur:

- Irritation of the eyes
- Rash 6 to 12 hours after the infusion or injection
- Liver irritation
Call your child’s doctor or nurse if:

- Fever of 101.5°F (38.6°C) or greater
- Mouth sores that prevent your child from eating or drinking
- Severe nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Skin rash
- Black, tarry looking stools
- Red, irritated looking eyes
- Bleeding or bruising

**Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.:**
Call your child's Hematology/Oncology Advanced Practice Nurse at (816) 234-3265.

**Monday through Friday after 5 p.m., and on weekends or holidays:**
Call (816) 234-3000 and ask the operator to page the Hematology/Oncology nurse or doctor "on-call."

**Call the Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222 if:**

- Too much medication is taken.
- Medication is accidentally taken.