

# Cytarabine

(sye-tare-a-been)

**Category:** Anticancer Agent

**Other Names for this Medication:** Cytosar-U®, Cytosine arabinoside

**Common Dosage Forms:** **Veterinary:** None. **Human:** 100 mg, 500 mg, & 1 g vials.

This information sheet does not contain all available information for this medication. It is to help answer commonly asked questions and help you give the medication safely and effectively to your animal. If you have other questions or need more information about this medication, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist.

## Key Information

- ▶ Cytarabine is a chemotherapy (anticancer) drug which can be hazardous to other animals and people that come in contact with it. On the day your animal gets the drug and then for a few days afterward, all bodily waste (urine, feces, litter), blood, or vomit should only be handled while wearing disposable gloves. Seal the waste and any items used to clean it (eg, paper towels, gloves) in a plastic bag and then place bag in another bag (double bag) before placing in with the regular trash.
- ▶ Cytarabine can be toxic to bone marrow and the gastrointestinal tract (vomiting and gastrointestinal upset).

## How is this medication useful?

Cytarabine is used to treat a variety of cancers in animals. It is also used to treat granulomatous meningoencephalomyelitis (GME; an inflammatory disease of the brain) in dogs.

The FDA (U.S. Food & Drug Administration) has approved this drug for use in humans but it is not officially approved for use in animals. The FDA allows veterinarians to prescribe products containing this drug in different species or for other conditions in certain situations. You and your veterinarian can discuss why this drug is the most appropriate choice.

## What should I tell my veterinarian to see if this medication can be safely given?

Many things might affect how well this drug will work in your animal. Be sure to discuss the following with your veterinarian so together you can make the best treatment decisions.

- ▶ Tell your veterinarian and pharmacist what medications (including vitamins, supplements, or herbal therapies) you are giving your animal, as well as the amount and schedule of each.
- ▶ Tell your veterinarian about any conditions or diseases your pet may have now or has had in the past.
- ▶ If your animal has been treated for the same disease or condition in the past, tell your veterinarian about the treatment and how well it did or didn't work.
- ▶ If your animal is pregnant or nursing, talk to your veterinarian about the risks of using this drug.
- ▶ Tell your veterinarian and pharmacist about any medication side effects (including allergic reactions, lack of appetite, diarrhea, itching, hair loss) your pet has developed in the past.

## When should this medication not be used or be used very carefully?

No drug is 100% safe in all patients, but your veterinarian will discuss with you any specific concerns about using this drug in your animal.

This drug **SHOULD NOT** be used in animals:

- ▶ That have had an allergic reaction to cytarabine.

This drug should be used **WITH CAUTION** in patients:

- ▶ With bone marrow suppression or existing infection. Your veterinarian may choose to delay use of cytarabine if your animal has either of these.

If your pet has either of these conditions, talk to your veterinarian about the potential risks versus benefits.

## What are the side effects of this medication?

- ▶ Bone marrow suppression is the most common side effect of this drug. The greatest effects on bone marrow usually occur about 5-7 days after treatment. Your veterinarian will do blood tests to watch for this, but if you see bleeding, bruising, fever (indicating an infection), or if your animal becomes very tired easily, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ▶ Gastrointestinal tract toxicity. Vomiting and diarrhea may be seen. If these are severe or continue, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- ▶ Liver damage is possible. Contact your veterinarian immediately if your pet loses its appetite, or develops severe vomiting, diarrhea, or weakness.
- ▶ Dogs: Loss of fur. Many dogs receiving chemotherapy will have minor hair coat changes (eg, shagginess, loss of luster). Breeds with continuously growing hair coats (eg, poodles, terriers, Afghan hounds, or old English sheepdogs) are more likely to experience significant hair loss.

## If my pet gets too much of this medication (an overdose), what should I do?

It is unlikely that your animal will receive this drug outside of the veterinarian's office.

## How should this medication be given?

Your veterinarian will administer this drug by injection in the office. Watch for any adverse reactions when your animal arrives home after receiving this drug.

## What should I do if I miss giving a dose of this medication?

You will not be administering this medication at home, but if you notice any of the adverse effects that your veterinarian has warned you about, contact your veterinarian immediately.

### How should I store this medication?

You will not be taking this medication home.

### Can handling this medication be hazardous to me, my family, or other pets?

- ▶ You will not be handling this medication, but for a few days after your animal receives it, this drug can be found in the animal's saliva, urine, feces, and blood.
- ▶ This drug can cause serious adverse effects in people or animals that are exposed to it, disposable gloves should be worn to avoid contact with bare skin. Be careful not to accidentally rub your eyes. Wear gloves when disposing of cat litter or dog droppings or cleaning up urine spills or vomit. Do not reuse gloves. **Seal the waste with all gloves and items used to clean it (eg, paper towels) in a plastic bag, then place into an additional plastic bag (double bag) before putting in the regular trash.**
- ▶ Do not let treated animals lick human skin. If skin exposure occurs, the area should be washed thoroughly with soap and water. Contact your physician if you have any concerns.
- ▶ Pregnant women **SHOULD NOT** handle any waste or items used to clean the waste while your animal is on this drug.

### How should I dispose of this medication if I don't use it all?

This medicine is only given in your veterinarian's office, so you will not need to dispose of it.

### What other information is important for this medication?

- ▶ Your veterinarian will need to perform follow up examinations and lab work on your animal after it receives this medication. Do not miss these important follow-up visits.
- ▶ Your animal should not receive vaccines containing live (or modified live) viruses while receiving this medication.
- ▶ In the interest of safety to other animals and humans, don't take your dog to a dog park or allow your animal to urinate and defecate in public places until your veterinarian tells you that it is okay to do so.
- ▶ Your animal should not participate in animal competitions while on this drug. Exposure to other animals may put your animal at serious risk of infections during chemotherapy treatment. Talk with your veterinarian about when it is safe to return to these events.

**If you have any other questions or concerns about this medication, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist.**