

# **Tocilizumab: Patient drug information**

**Brand Names: US: Actemra**

## **What is this drug used for?**

- It is used to treat some types of arthritis.
- It is used to treat a certain artery problem called giant cell arteritis (GCA).
- It is used to treat cytokine release syndrome (CRS).
- It is used to slow the progress of lung disease in some people.
- It is used in certain people to treat COVID-19.
- It may be given to you for other reasons. Talk with the doctor.

## **What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?**

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have an infection.
- If you have a low white blood cell count or a low platelet count.
- If you have liver disease or raised liver enzymes.
- If you are taking any of these drugs: Abatacept, adalimumab, anakinra, certolizumab, etanercept, golimumab, infliximab, or rituximab.

## **What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?**

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- You may have more chance of getting an infection. Wash hands often. Stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu.
- If you have high blood sugar (diabetes), talk with your doctor. You may be more likely to get infections.
- If you have had hepatitis B before or carry the virus, talk with your doctor. This drug can cause the virus to become active again.
- Hepatitis B testing needs to be done as you were told by the doctor. Talk with the doctor.
- Drugs that may suppress the immune system like this drug may raise the risk of cancer. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- Have blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Talk with the doctor.
- If possible, make sure all vaccines are up to date before treatment with this drug.

- Talk with your doctor before getting any vaccines. Use of some vaccines with this drug may either raise the chance of an infection or make the vaccine not work as well.
- You may bleed more easily. Be careful and avoid injury. Use a soft toothbrush and an electric razor.
- Treatment with this drug may lead to higher cholesterol and triglycerides. The effect of these changes on heart health is not known. Talk with the doctor.
- If your weight changes, talk with your doctor. The dose of this drug may need to be changed.
- Liver problems have happened with this drug. Sometimes, this has been severe and has led to a liver transplant or death. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- Birth control pills and other hormone-based birth control may not work as well to prevent pregnancy. Use some other kind of birth control also like a condom when taking this drug.
- This drug may cause harm to the unborn baby if you take it while you are pregnant. If you are pregnant or you get pregnant while taking this drug, call your doctor right away.

### **What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?**

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat. Rarely, some allergic reactions have been deadly.
- Signs of infection like fever, chills, very bad sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, more sputum or change in color of sputum, pain with passing urine, mouth sores, or wound that will not heal.
- Signs of bleeding like throwing up or coughing up blood; vomit that looks like coffee grounds; blood in the urine; black, red, or tarry stools; bleeding from the gums; abnormal vaginal bleeding; bruises without a cause or that get bigger; or bleeding you cannot stop.
- Signs of liver problems like dark urine, feeling tired, not hungry, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Signs of high or low blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Feeling very tired or weak.
- Warm, red, or painful skin or sores on the body.

- A skin lump or growth; change in color or size of a mole.
- Shortness of breath; chest pain or pressure.
- Not able to pass urine or change in how much urine is passed.
- Tears in the stomach or bowel wall have happened in certain people taking this drug. Call your doctor right away if you have swelling or pain in your stomach that is very bad, gets worse, or does not go away. Call your doctor right away if you throw up blood or have throw up that looks like coffee grounds; upset stomach or throwing up that does not go away; or black, tarry, or bloody stools.

### **What are some other side effects of this drug?**

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Headache.
- Signs of a common cold.
- Nose or throat irritation.
- Irritation where the shot is given.
- Diarrhea or constipation.

### **How is this drug best taken?**

- It is given as an infusion into a vein over a period of time.