

Cytarabine

other names for this medication: cytosine arabinoside, ARA-C, 1-beta-d-arabinofuranosylcytosine, arabinosylcytosine, Tarabine-PRS and Cytosar-U

How Is This Medication Useful?

Cytarabine is used to treat cancers of the lymphatic system and leukemias in pets, especially when those tumors invade the brain or spinal cord.

What Side Effects Can Be Seen With Its Use?

Like many chemotherapy drugs, cytarabine decreases the ability of the bone marrow to produce blood cells which may result in anemias, increased risk for infection, or bleeding/bruising. If your pet shows signs of lack of energy, weakness, infection, bruising or bleeding you should contact your veterinarian immediately. If bone marrow suppression occurs with this drug, it will usually occur at about 5-7 days after the drug was given. Recovery of the bone marrow usually occurs within 7-14 days after the drug was given.

Cytarabine may cause loss of appetite, stomach upset, or diarrhea. Your pet will be given an anti-nausea injection 30 minutes prior to receiving the first injection of cytarabine, to minimize problems with nausea. If necessary at home, give the anti-nausea or diarrhea pills you have, as needed, and call your vet to let them know you have used these drugs.

Allergic reaction can rarely occur after administration of cytarabine. Antihistamines are administered 30 minutes prior to giving cytarabine, to in an attempt to prevent this problem.

Cytarabine can sometimes cause redness or inflammation in the eyes (conjunctivitis) or in the mouth. If any soreness in the eyes or mouth are noted, let your veterinarian know as soon as possible.

Cytarabine can rarely cause toxicity to the liver. While taking cytarabine, we will check your pet's liver enzymes in the blood to monitor for these problems prior to giving cytarabine and every 3 months or so. If liver values become elevated, we may stop giving cytarabine.

Cytarabine can sometimes cause fever. If your pet feels poorly after cytarabine treatment, please take a rectal temperature. If above 103F, please call your veterinarian.

Like many chemotherapy drugs, cytarabine should not be used in pregnant or nursing dogs or cats, or in male pets to be used for breeding.

How Should It Be Given?

It will take at least 2-5 hours for your dog to receive cytarabine. It can be given as an IV drip over 4 hours, or the entire dose can be divided into 2-4 doses, and given as an injection under the skin every hour until the entire dose has been given.

What Other Information Is Important About This Medication?

As cytarabine can cause immune suppression in humans, you should wear gloves and wash hands after giving this medication. Pet owners who are pregnant, breast-feeding or trying to conceive should not handle this medication.

Some other drugs can interact with this medication so tell your veterinarian about any drugs or foods that you currently give your animal. Cytarabine should be used with caution with other drugs that might suppress the bone marrow. Cytarabine may decrease the amount of the heart medication **digoxin** (tablets only) that is absorbed after oral dosing. This effect may persist for several days after cytarabine has been discontinued. Do not give new foods or medications without first asking your veterinarian. Modified Live vaccines should never be given to any animal on cancer chemotherapy.

Cytarabine is eliminated from the body primarily in the urine and feces. Any urine or feces from this animal should be cleaned up with gloves for at least 48 hours after the last treatment. Waste should be disposed of in a sealed plastic bag.

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