

Information for Patients about Medicines containing Tocilizumab

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Tocilizumab is a biological medicine. Biological medicines are medicines made or derived from living cells, and they are widely used in the treatment of many conditions.

Tocilizumab blocks the action of a specific protein called interleukin-6. This is found in high levels in patients with inflammatory conditions such as Rheumatoid Arthritis. Blocking the action of interleukin-6 can reduce inflammation and other symptoms of these conditions such as pain.

Tocilizumab is administered by weekly injection under the skin (subcutaneous injection) or by monthly infusion (drip) in a hospital.

The subcutaneous injection of tocilizumab is supplied to patients by their Community Pharmacy. It is used for the treatment of inflammatory conditions, including Rheumatoid Arthritis and Giant Cell Arteritis in adults, and Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis in children.

What are the best-value biological medicines for tocilizumab?

The best-value biological (BVB) medicines identified by the HSE for tocilizumab are:

- **Avtozma®**
- **Tyenne®.**

Avtozma® and Tyenne® are biosimilar medicines; what is a biosimilar medicine?

A biosimilar medicine is very similar to the original biological medicine. It works in the same way.

RoActemra® was the original biological medicine for tocilizumab. Recently, biosimilar medicines containing tocilizumab became available. Avtozma® and Tyenne® are biosimilar medicines of RoActemra®.

Are biosimilar medicines safe?

Biosimilar medicines are tested to show they are just as safe and effective as the original biological medicine.

The original biological medicine (RoActemra®) and the biosimilar medicines (Avtozma® and Tyenne®) can cause similar side-effects.

Biosimilar medicines are also available for adalimumab, etanercept and infliximab. These biosimilar medicines are frequently prescribed by Rheumatologists and their teams.

What's changing?

At present, no changes are being introduced in relation to the reimbursement of tocilizumab on the High Tech Arrangement.

The HSE has identified BVB medicines for tocilizumab on the High Tech Arrangement, Avtozma® and Tyenne®.

The HSE recommends that all new patients being initiated on treatment with tocilizumab on the High Tech Arrangement should be prescribed a recommended BVB medicine.

I am an existing patient prescribed tocilizumab, what does this mean for me?

If you are an existing patient, you will continue to receive your medicine from your community pharmacy.

If you are currently on a non-BVB medicine (e.g. RoActemra®), your consultant or a member of their team may discuss the possibility of switching to a BVB medicine.

Has my consultant being informed about the best-value biological medicines?

Yes. Consultants in rheumatology are aware of the BVB medicines.

Biosimilar medicines are widely used by Rheumatologists and their teams.

Why is the HSE recommending a best-value biological medicine for tocilizumab?

The BVB medicines are provided to the HSE at a lower cost. Prescribing the BVB medicines will save the HSE money. This means we can give new innovative medicines to even more patients, including for the treatment of conditions in rheumatology.

What supports are available?

Supports for patients prescribed the BVB medicines can include:

- nurse home visit to provide training on administering the injection
- supply of sharps bins and waste collection service
- provision of product information.

Your consultant or a member of their team will register you for these services.

Where can I get more information on biosimilar medicines?

Further information on biosimilar medicines and the BVB medicines is available on the following websites:

HSE-Medicines Management Programme: www.hse.ie/mmp under Best-value medicines

Health Products Regulatory Authority: www.hpra.ie/regulation/human-medicine/patients-and-healthcare-professionals/biosimilar-medicines/biological-and-biosimilar-medicines--what-patients-should-know

European Medicines Agency: www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/biosimilar-medicines-overview#information-for-patients-and-healthcare-professionals-section