

PENTAMIDINE

Other NAMES: Pentacarinat®

WHY is this drug prescribed?

Pentamidine is used in the prevention and treatment of *pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (PCP). It is also used as an antiparasitic agent for the treatment of parasites. Pentamidine is used when a person has experienced adverse effects or toxicity to other drugs, such as trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX, Bactrim®, Septra®) or dapsone.

HOW should this drug be taken?

For the prevention of PCP, pentamidine is given by inhalation. This involves breathing in the drug through a device called a nebulizer. The nebulizer converts the drug into a mist that then coats your lungs. The usual dose for inhalation is 300 mg given once every 4 weeks on a regular basis. The exact procedure for inhalation will be explained to you at the clinic when you go to receive your dose.

For the treatment of PCP, pentamidine can be given intravenously (I.V.) over a 2 to 3 hour period, or intramuscularly (I.M.). Pentamidine is given once a day for 14 to 21 days. The dose is determined by your weight and may need to be adjusted if you have kidney problems.

What should you do if you FORGET a dose?

If you miss doses of inhaled pentamidine, you are increasing your risk of catching PCP. If you have missed an appointment, call your clinic immediately to rebook an appointment to receive your pentamidine dose as soon as possible.

What ADVERSE EFFECTS can this drug cause? What should you do about them?

Inhalation of pentamidine can cause you to **cough**, especially if you smoke or have asthma. This can be controlled by another drug called a bronchodilator [eg. salbutamol (Ventolin®)]. This will help you breathe more easily. Pentamidine does not taste very good. You may experience a bitter or **metallic taste**; sucking on sugar-free candy afterwards may help. During your treatment, you may have a **burning feeling in your throat**. Drinking some liquid will help. Dizziness, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, fatigue, fever, chills, night sweats, chest pain and a skin rash may also occur.

I.V. pentamidine can have serious adverse effects. **Low blood pressure** may occur and this is why the drug will be given to you while you are lying down. Pentamidine can also cause **anemia** (reduced number of red blood cells that can make you feel tired or

short of breath), **neutropenia** (a reduced number of white blood cells that help you fight infections), **thrombocytopenia** (reduced number of platelets that can increase your risk of bleeding or developing bruises), rapid and irregular heartbeat, liver, kidney and pancreas problems. Because of the effect of pentamidine on the pancreas, **decreases or increases in your blood sugar level** may occur. Blood tests must be done regularly to watch for the presence of these adverse effects.

When given by the intramuscular route, pain and tenderness at the site of injection may occur.

If you are experiencing any adverse effects, please discuss them with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

It is important that you keep your doctor appointments and come for your laboratory tests so that your progress can be followed.

What other PRECAUTIONS should you follow while using this drug?

Before starting pentamidine, please inform your doctor if you are allergic to this drug or if you have a history of kidney, liver, pancreas, heart or blood problems.

The safety of pentamidine has not been established during pregnancy and

breastfeeding. Please discuss this with your doctor if this is a concern. In general, breastfeeding is NOT recommended if you have HIV as you can transmit the virus to your baby through your breast milk.

Pentamidine may interfere with other drugs. Also, drugs that are toxic to the kidneys, liver, pancreas and to the blood may increase pentamidine's adverse effects. Inform your doctor and pharmacist of all prescribed and non-prescribed drugs you are taking. As well, you should inform them of natural products you are taking. If you wish to start a new drug or natural product, please consult with your pharmacist before doing so.

How should this drug be STORED?

Pentamidine should be kept at room temperature (15-30°C) and protected from light. Once diluted, pentamidine is stable for up to 24 hours at room temperature. Keep this drug well out of the reach of children.

If you have any questions or concerns about this drug or if you are experiencing adverse effects, please discuss them with your pharmacist, doctor or nurse.

Write questions or concerns down to ensure they are addressed.

The following pharmacist is available to answer questions:

Pharmacist: _____

Telephone: _____

PENTAMIDINE

MEDICATION

FACT SHEET

Reference: Pentamidine Product Monograph. Hospira Healthcare Corp., Saint-Laurent, QC, 2007. Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2003. Reviewed 2009.

Additional medication fact sheets and updates may be found at: www.hivclinic.ca