



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Fluorouracil injection

Other names: 5-Fluorouracil, 5FU, Adrucil

- **Fluorouracil** (flure oh yoor' a sill) is a drug that is used to treat many types of cancer. It is a clear liquid that is injected into a vein.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to fluorouracil or to capecitabine (XELODA®) before using fluorouracil.
- A **blood test** may be taken before each treatment. The dose and timing of your chemotherapy may be changed based on the test results and/or other side effects.
- For some kinds of fluorouracil treatments you will be asked to suck on ice chips while the drug is being given. This is not recommended for all kinds of fluorouracil treatments and your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist can advise you.
- Other drugs such as warfarin (COUMADIN®), phenytoin (DILANTIN®) and fosphenytoin (CEREBRYX®) may **interact** with fluorouracil. Tell your doctor if you are taking this or any other drugs as you may need extra blood tests or your dose may need to be changed. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start taking any new drugs.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of fluorouracil.
- Fluorouracil may cause **sterility** in men and **menopause** in women. If you plan to have children, discuss this with your doctor before being treated with fluorouracil.
- Fluorouracil may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with fluorouracil. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Tell** your doctor, dentist, and other health professionals that you are being treated with fluorouracil before you receive any treatment from them.

Side effects are listed in the following table in the order in which they may occur. Tips to help manage the side effects are included.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
Fluorouracil burns if it leaks under the skin.	Tell your nurse or doctor immediately if you feel burning, stinging or any other change while the drug is being given.
Pain or tenderness may occur where the needle was placed.	Apply cool compresses or soak in cool water for 15-20 minutes several times a day.
Nausea does not usually occur with fluorouracil.	
Diarrhea may occur. If you have diarrhea and it is not controlled, you can quickly become dehydrated.	To help diarrhea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of liquids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. Avoid high fibre foods as outlined in <i>Food Choices to Help Manage Diarrhea</i> .* Tell your healthcare team if you have diarrhea for more than 24 hours.
Sore mouth may occur a few days after treatment. Mouth sores can occur on the tongue, the sides of the mouth or in the throat. Mouth sores or bleeding gums can lead to an infection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brush your teeth gently after eating and at bedtime with a very soft toothbrush. If your gums bleed, use gauze instead of a brush. Use baking soda instead of toothpaste. • Make a mouthwash with ¼ teaspoon baking soda AND ¼ teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day. • Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth</i>.*
Your white blood cells may decrease 7-14 days after your treatment. They usually return to normal 30 days after your last treatment. White blood cells protect your body by fighting bacteria (germs) that cause infection. When they are low, you are at greater risk of having an infection.	To help prevent infection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wash your hands often and always after using the bathroom. • Avoid crowds and people who are sick. • Call your healthcare team immediately at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 38°C or 100°F by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Your platelets may decrease 7-14 days after your treatment. They usually return to normal 30 days after your last treatment. Platelets help to make your blood clot when you hurt yourself. You may bruise or bleed more easily than usual.</p>	<p>To help prevent bleeding problems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to bruise, cut, or burn yourself. • Clean your nose by blowing gently. Do not pick your nose. • Avoid constipation. • Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush as your gums may bleed more easily. Maintain good oral hygiene. <p>Some medications such as ASA (e.g., ASPIRIN®) or ibuprofen (e.g., ADVIL®) may increase your risk of bleeding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not stop taking any medication that has been prescribed by your doctor (e.g., ASA for your heart). • For minor pain, try acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) first, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.
<p>Your skin may sunburn easily.</p>	<p>To help prevent sunburn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid direct sunlight. • Wear a hat, long sleeves and long pants or skirt outside on sunny days. • Apply a sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 30. <p>Tell your healthcare team if you have a severe sunburn or skin reaction such as itching, rash, or swelling after sun exposure.</p> <p>Refer to <i>Your Medication Sun Sensitivity and Sunscreens*</i> or the <i>BC Health Guide</i> for more information.</p>
<p>Skin rashes may occur.</p>	<p>To help itching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can use calamine lotion. • If very irritating, call your healthcare team during office hours. • Otherwise make sure to mention it at your next visit.
<p>Loss of appetite may occur and may persist long after discontinuation of fluorouracil.</p>	<p>Try the ideas in <i>Food Ideas to Help with Decreased Appetite.*</i></p>

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Hair loss sometimes occurs with fluorouracil. Your hair will grow back once you stop treatment with fluorouracil. Colour and texture may change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a gentle shampoo and soft brush. • Care should be taken with use of hair spray, bleaches, dyes and perms. <p>If hair loss is a problem, refer to <i>Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes – Patient Handout</i>.*</p>

*Please ask your nurse or pharmacist for a copy.

CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM OR GET EMERGENCY HELP IMMEDIATELY IF YOU HAVE:

- Signs of an **allergic reaction** (rare) soon after a treatment including dizziness, fast heart beat, face swelling or breathing problems.
- Signs of an **infection** such as fever (over 38°C or 100°F by an oral thermometer); chills; cough; pain or burning when you pass urine.
- Signs of **bleeding problems** such as black, tarry stools; blood in urine; pinpoint red spots on skin, extensive bruising.
- Signs of **heart or lung problems** such as fast or uneven heartbeat, chest pain, chest pressure, shortness of breath, or difficulty in breathing, swelling of ankles, or fainting.
- Sudden **abdominal pain** or tenderness.

CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE (DURING OFFICE HOURS) IF YOU HAVE:

- **Painful hand-foot skin reaction** such as painful redness, peeling, tingling, numbness, swelling, or blistering of the palms of your hands and/or the bottoms of your feet.
- **Uncontrolled nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.**
- Signs of **anemia** such as unusual tiredness or weakness.
- **Severe skin irritation.**

CHECK WITH YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CONTINUE OR BOTHER YOU:

- Painless hand-foot skin reaction such as redness, peeling, tingling, numbness, swelling, or blistering of the palms of your hands and/or bottoms of your feet.
- Easy bruising or minor bleeding.
- Redness, swelling, pain, or sores where the needle was placed.
- Redness, swelling, pain, or sores on your lips, tongue, mouth, or throat.
- Heartburn; mild to moderate abdominal or stomach pain.
- Dizziness or trouble walking.
- Eye irritation or changes in eyesight.

