



Provincial Health Services Authority

For the Patient: Dactinomycin

Other names: COSMEGEN®, Actinomycin D

- **Dactinomycin** (dak ti noe mye' sin) is a drug that is used to treat many types of cancer. It is a clear, gold-coloured liquid that is injected into a vein.
- Tell your doctor if you have ever had an unusual or **allergic reaction** to dactinomycin before receiving this treatment. Tell your doctor if you have or recently had chickenpox or a herpes zoster infection (shingles).
- 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.
- Other drugs may **interact** with dactinomycin. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before you start or stop taking any other drugs.
- The **drinking of alcohol** (in small amounts) does not appear to affect the safety or usefulness of dactinomycin.
- Dactinomycin may damage sperm and may harm the baby if used during pregnancy. It is best to use **birth control** while being treated with dactinomycin. Tell your doctor right away if you or your partner becomes pregnant. Do not breast feed during treatment.
- **Tell** doctors, dentists, and other health professionals that you are being treated with dactinomycin before you receive any treatment from them, including vaccinations.

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
Dactinomycin 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.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>Nausea and vomiting may occur after your treatment and may last for 24 hours.</p>	<p>You will be given a prescription for antinausea drug(s) to take before your chemotherapy treatment and/or at home. It is easier to prevent nausea than treat it once it has occurred, so follow directions closely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of fluids. • Eat and drink often in small amounts. • Try the ideas in <i>Practical Tips to Manage Nausea</i>.*
<p>Your white blood cells may decrease 7-14 days after your treatment. They usually return to normal 21-25 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.</p>	<p>To help prevent infection:</p> <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 doctor immediately at the first sign of an infection such as fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer), chills, cough, or burning when you pass urine.
<p>Your platelets may decrease 7-14 days after your treatment. They usually return to normal 21-25 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, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day, but occasional use of ibuprofen may be acceptable.

SIDE EFFECTS	MANAGEMENT
<p>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.</p>	<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 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda AND $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt in 1 cup warm water and rinse several times a day. • Try the ideas in Food Ideas to Try with a Sore Mouth.*
<p>Tiredness and lack of energy may occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not drive a car or operate machinery if you are feeling tired. • Try the ideas in Fatigue/Tiredness – Patient Handout OR Your Bank to Energy Savings: Helping People with Cancer Handle Fatigue.*
<p>Hair loss sometimes occurs with dactinomycin. Hair will grow back once you stop treatment with dactinomycin. Colour and texture may change.</p>	<p>If hair loss is a problem, refer to Resources for Hair Loss and Appearance Changes – Patient Handout.*</p>
<p>Your skin may sunburn more easily than usual.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to Your Medication Sun Sensitivity and Sunscreens* or the BC Health Guide for more information. • After sun exposure, if you have a severe sunburn or skin reaction such as itching, rash, or swelling, contact your doctor.
<p>A flu-like illness may occur shortly after your treatment. You may have fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and joint aches. Flu-like symptoms usually disappear on their own.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take acetaminophen (e.g., TYLENOL®) every 4-6 hours if needed, to a maximum of 4 g (4000 mg) per day. • Fever (over 100°F or 38°C by an oral thermometer) which occurs more than a few days after treatment may be a sign of an infection. Report this to your doctor immediately.

*Please ask your chemotherapy nurse or pharmacist for a copy.

