

Aerosolized Pentamidine

Pentamidine (pen-TAM-i-deen) is a liquid antibiotic breathed into the lungs to prevent or treat a lung infection called pneumocystis jiroveci pneumonia (PJP) previous name P. carinii. People whose immune systems are weak because of disease, organ transplant or medicines they take are at higher risk for PJP.

How long do I have to take pentamidine?

Some people take pentamidine once a month for six months. Others about once a month for a longer time. If you are not sure how long you have to take this medicine, please talk with your doctor.

What are the side effects?

Pentamidine has fewer side effects when it is inhaled. Some of the common side effects include:

- Bitter taste in the mouth
- Dry throat
- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness

How is this medicine given?

Before you receive it, the respiratory therapist (RT) will give you a medicine called albuterol. This medicine helps to open up the airways in your lungs so you don't have a hard time breathing or coughing during the pentamidine treatment.

The RT will use a small cup called a nebulizer to give the pentamidine. When air is attached to the cup, it will cause the liquid medicine to become a mist you can breathe in.

You will be asked to lie back, so your head is raised no more than six inches while you receive this treatment. This is done so when you inhale, most of the medicine will end up in the top of your lungs, where PJP often starts.

You must put the mouthpiece in your mouth, seal your lips tightly around it, and take deep breaths during the treatment. It will take 20-30 minutes. When there is no more mist formed, the treatment is done.

Anyone who is in the room with you while you are taking the treatment will need to wear a special mask. This is to protect them from breathing in the medicine too. Otherwise, they could have the same side effects. Be sure to tell the RT if you or anyone with you might be pregnant. They should not be in the room when pentamidine is given.

If you have trouble breathing, shortness of breath, or chest tightness during or after the treatment, tell the RT right away.

When the treatment is done, you may take a drink of water, juice, or suck on a piece of candy to get the bitter taste out of your mouth.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 12/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#5527.