

CLIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Updated: March 2020

Hydroxycarbamide

- Keep this leaflet safe, as you may need to refer to it again.
- Please ask your vet or veterinary nurse if you have any further questions.
- This medicine has been prescribed for *your* pet ONLY. Do not take it yourself or give it to another person or any other animal; it may harm them even if their symptoms appear to be the same.

The medicine you have been given for your dog or cat is called hydroxycarbamide. It may have a trade name such as Hydrea®, but often will just be called hydroxycarbamide or hydroxyurea.

What is hydroxycarbamide?

Hydroxycarbamide belongs to a group of medicines called *cytotoxic drugs*. Cytotoxic drugs have both anti-cancer activity, and the potential to damage normal tissue; their use is sometimes referred to as 'chemotherapy'. They may be used to treat diseases involving abnormal growth of cells, help to manage/treat cancer. Cytotoxic drugs are often used in combination with several other drugs and may be used alongside radiotherapy or surgery.

Why has my pet been prescribed hydroxycarbamide?

Hydroxycarbamide is most commonly used to treat diseases affecting blood cells; in particular, polycythaemia vera (where excessive numbers of red blood cells are produced) and some forms of chronic leukaemia (cancers involving the white blood cells). It is also used in brain tumours (canine meningiomas) and very occasionally to treat mast cell tumours (a type of skin cancer).

How should I store hydroxycarbamide?

This medicine does not require special storage conditions. For safety, **all medicines should be kept out of the reach and sight of children in a childproof container.**

How do I give hydroxycarbamide capsules to my pet?

Disposable gloves should be worn at all times when handling and administering this drug. DO NOT split or crush these tablets; only use whole ones. Disguise the tablets in small quantities of a strongly flavoured food that your pet likes. Pregnant or breastfeeding women, children, the elderly and immunosuppressed individuals should not handle chemotherapy drugs. If you are unsure, please discuss this with your veterinary surgeon.

Faeces, urine and saliva from dogs and cats taking hydroxycarbamide will contain small traces of the drug. Therefore, do not allow your pet to lick your skin (including hands and face) and make sure they go to the toilet well away from other pets and from people. Wear disposable gloves when picking up faeces in bags. Dispose of faeces in domestic waste. Dogs should be walked in quiet areas. Do not allow them to soil areas where children will be playing or where there is a high dog population. Use a bottle of water to dilute down any urine passed on solid surfaces (e.g. pavements or concrete).

How long will my pet need to take hydroxycarbamide?

Your vet will advise you on the length of time for which you will need to give this medicine. This may vary between patients. Unused tablets and empty containers should be returned to your veterinary practice for safe disposal.

What should I do if I run out of capsules?

Try not to run out. Make sure you order more capsules from your vet if your supply is getting low. If you do run out, contact your own vet for further advice and restart the course as soon as possible.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

If a dose is missed, give the medication as soon as possible. However, it is best to skip the missed dose if it is almost time for your pet's next scheduled dose. **DO NOT** give a double dose to make up for the missed dose and do not exceed the total stated dose in any one 24-hour period.

What should I do if my pet is accidentally given too many doses?

Contact your vet immediately if your pet receives an overdose of hydroxycarbamide as this can be fatal. Overdose causes a condition called methaemoglobinaemia, where the blood turns an abnormal

brown colour and the lips and gums of the patient look blue. This is due to lack of oxygen because the red blood cells are no longer able to transport oxygen around the body. Other signs include shortness of breath, weakness and vomiting.

Can my pet take hydroxycarbamide if I am already giving them other drugs?

Tell your vet if you are giving your pet any other medications, even if you think they already know. This includes herbal or off-the-shelf remedies from a pet shop or pharmacy. In particular, tell your vet if your pet is being treated with digoxin (used to treat some heart conditions) or phenytoin (used to help control epilepsy).

What are the possible side effects of hydroxycarbamide for my pet?

In people, hydroxycarbamide can cause nausea, vomiting, reduced appetite, diarrhoea and skin reactions. If your pet shows any unusual symptoms whilst taking this medication, please contact your vet.

What should I do if my pet is unwell while taking hydroxycarbamide?

If your pet is unwell while receiving medication, you should not give any further doses and should contact your vet as soon as possible for advice.

What should I do if a person accidentally takes this drug?

If a person accidentally takes your pet's medication, the person should be taken to the local hospital **immediately**. Take this leaflet and any remaining capsules plus their container (even if it is empty) with you.

Whom do I contact if I want to know more?

If you have any questions about this drug, or concerns about your pet's health, contact your own vet. They will know your pet's medical history and will know about hydroxycarbamide.

The Prescribing Cascade

This medicine is authorized for use in human patients and is used by vets under the 'prescribing cascade'. The medicine is not authorized by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), for use in dogs/cats/pets. Your vet can explain the 'prescribing cascade' in further detail to you and also explain why they are prescribing this drug for your pet. You will be asked to sign a consent form stating that you understand the reasons that the drug is being prescribed and its possible complications, before the treatment is issued.

© British Small Animal Veterinary Association 2020. While the editors and the BSAVA have made every effort in preparing this information leaflet, the contents and any statements are made in good faith purely for general guidance and cannot be regarded as substitute for professional advice. The publishers, contributors and the BSAVA do not take responsibility for the information provided on this leaflet and hence do not accept any liability for loss or expense incurred (by you or persons that you disseminate the materials to) as a result of relying on content in this leaflet. To this end, you are advised to consult your vet and seek their professional advice before taking any steps set out in this leaflet. If you are a vet, you must not rely on the contents in this leaflet without independently verifying the correctness and veracity of the contents. BSAVA is not responsible for any alterations made to this document from the version supplied.