Let's Talk About...

Ribavirin

What is ribavirin?

Ribavirin is an antiviral drug (a medicine that kills viruses) used to treat severe respiratory syncitial virus (RSV) infections, influenza A and B, adenovirus, recent transplant patients, and immunodeficient and immunosuppressed patients.

How does a child receive ribavirin?

A respiratory therapist will give your child the ribavirin treatment. Your child will receive Ribavirin with special equipment that makes a fine mist. This equipment is called a "small particle aerosol generator" (SPAG). The fine mist goes right into the lungs. Your child will wear a special mask while receiving the treatment and breathe in the fine mist with this mask.

What happens before a ribavirin treatment?

Your child will receive an albuterol breathing treatment 15 minutes before receiving her Ribavirin treatment. Ribavirin can cause bronchospasms (like an asthma attack), and the albuterol prevents bronchospasms.

How often will my child receive ribavirin treatments?

Ribavirin treatments are three times a day. The treatment will last two hours and then there will be a six hour break before the next treatment. Your child will receive two treatments at night and one treatment during the day. This is so your child can sleep at night and eat during the day.

Does ribavirin have any side effects?

Side effects may include:

- Can lower blood pressure
- Headache
- Rash
- Skin irritation
- Anemia
- Eye infection
- Bronchospasm (for example, an asthma attack)
- Irritation of the nose and throat
- Cardiac arrest

Are there any special precautions when my child receives ribavirin?

- If a person has asthma, they should not be in the room while your child receives ribavirin, as it may cause the person to have bronchospasms (like an asthma attack).
- If a person is pregnant, or is a woman at the age that she could be pregnant, or is breastfeeding, that person should not be in the room when ribavirin is given.
- The medical team will place your child in a special "negative pressure room". This is a room where the air flow vents to the outside. This cleans the air and sends the ribavirin out of the room after your child receives the treatment.
- When your child is receiving ribavirin treatment, everyone in the room should wear a gown, gloves and mask.
- Caregivers such as nurses, respiratory care, and doctors will use goggles while your child is receiving ribavirin therapy.
- Your child and visitors should not wear contact lenses when your child is receiving a ribavirin treatment.

What do I do if I have questions?

Your child's nurse, respiratory therapist or doctor can answer any questions you have about ribavirin treatments.

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