What is Eprex®?

Eprex® is a medication that works like a hormone found in the body. This hormone is called Erythropoietin and it controls the production of red blood cells in the body. Red blood cells are needed to carry oxygen to all parts of the body.

What is this medication used for?

Eprex® (an erythropoietin stimulating agent or ESA) is used to make red blood cells. It is prescribed by the Blood Management Service (BMS) for patients who will have major, elective surgery including those that are participating in a blood donation program. It may also be prescribed for patients that have a lower blood count before surgery. In raising a patient’s blood count before surgery, a blood transfusion may be avoided.

How is Eprex® given?

Eprex® is usually given once a week for 1 to 8 weeks prior to surgery. The number of doses depends upon your starting blood count (hemoglobin), your health, and if you are participating in a blood donation program. Usually most patients receive 1 or 2 doses. Eprex® is administered by a small needle—similar to insulin. It is injected just under the skin of your upper arm, thigh or abdomen. The injection is usually given by a member of the Blood Management Service but can be coordinated with other health professionals if appropriate.

Patient Instructions

- Tell your health care team about any medical problems and about any allergies you have or have had in the past.
- Tell your health care team if you have or have had high blood pressure, seizures, blood clots, liver disease, porphyria (a genetic disorder affecting heme in blood) or gout.
- Your health care team will also measure your blood iron levels, red blood cell levels and other factors in your blood, prior to starting Eprex® as deemed appropriate.
- Eprex® for surgery patients is listed as an ‘Exceptional Drug Status’ medication by Manitoba Pharmacare. It can only be prescribed by the Blood Management Service for pre-surgical patients. This is a costly medication and you may want to check your health insurance coverage for this medication.

When should Eprex® not be used?

You should not use Eprex® if:

- You are allergic to any of the ingredients in the product.
- You have pure red cell aplasia (PRCA).
- You have uncontrolled high blood pressure.
- You have certain types of cancer (breast, head & neck).
- You have had blood clots or a stroke. For example pulmonary embolism or DVT which is a clot in the leg.
- You cannot for any reason receive adequate anti-clot treatment.
Side effects and what to do about them

Any medication may have unwanted effects. Tell your health care team about any unusual signs or symptoms. The side effects reported most often in all patients receiving Eprex® are flu like symptoms such as dizziness, drowsiness, fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, weakness, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Redness, burning and pain at the place where Eprex® is given have also been reported. Some patients will experience no side effects at all.

There is a small possibility of worsening high blood pressure if red blood cell production occurs too rapidly. Your team may need to reduce your dose of Eprex® and/or change your blood pressure medication if this happens. Tell your health care team if you are experiencing any of the following: chest pain, shortness of breath, an increase in headaches, unusual headaches, and light-headedness.

SERIOUS side effects, how often they happen and what to do about them

Additional side effects which have been reported more often in chronic renal failure patients than other patients include increases in blood pressure, seizures and pure red cell aplasia (PRCA). PRCA is a condition in which severe and sudden anemia (low blood count) develops due to bone marrow failure. PRCA could result in a dependency on blood transfusions.

If you develop signs of allergy such as wheezing, tightness in the chest, difficulty breathing, hives, itching, rash, or swelling of the throat, face, eyelids, mouth or tongue, obtain medical help immediately and notify your health care team.

How to store Eprex®

Store unopened in a refrigerator between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius. Do no freeze. Protect from light. Place the medication in a small cooler bag if it need to be transported and is out of the refrigerator for longer than 30 minutes.

Do not use this product after expiry date written on package. Do not use this medication if it has been left out of the fridge for a prolonged period of time.

Keep this and all medications in a safe place away from children.