Introduction
This fact sheet describes intrathecal methotrexate, how it is given and some of the possible side effects. Some rare and long-term side effects are explained, as well as the more common ones. Each person reacts differently to drugs so your child will not necessarily suffer from every side effect mentioned. If you are concerned about any of these side effects, please ring one of the contact numbers listed and ask for your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What is Intrathecal Methotrexate?
It is a chemotherapy drug which is given to prevent leukaemia cells entering the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) around the spine and brain. This drug is also used to treat leukaemia found in the CSF.

How is it given?
Intrathecal methotrexate is given through a needle which is inserted in one of the spaces between the bones in the lower back into the CSF. This is known as a lumbar puncture. When drugs are given in this way they are said to be given intrathecally.

What are the side effects?
This drug causes very few side effects. When given intrathecally, most of the discomfort is as a result of the method of giving the drug.

Intrathecal methotrexate can occasionally cause headaches, dizziness, tiredness, blurred vision or loss of balance for a few hours. It may help to lie down for a short while afterwards.

Occasionally it may cause backache, stiff neck and pain down the legs. Rarely damage to the brain may occur which may result in a decrease in the ability to learn and this can be permanent. Very rarely severe brain damage may occur.

Very occasionally it can cause a sore mouth and mouth ulcers.

The place where the needle is inserted may become sore or slightly bruised.

Any plaster placed over the lumbar puncture site must be left on for at least 24 hours.

Use of other medication:
Check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving your child other prescription or over-the-counter medications that is not part of your child’s chemotherapy or supportive therapy protocol.
Handling of body waste

- Urine, blood, faeces and vomit need to be treated with caution during treatment and for 24 hours after.
- Wear gloves when changing nappies.
- Put dirty nappies in a plastic bag and then dispose of them in household rubbish.
- Double flush the toilet after your child uses it.
- If your child wets or soils the bed, remove the bedclothes and wash them twice.

Always practice safe sex, especially when receiving chemotherapy treatment, to avoid chemical transmission to your sexual partner and prevent unwanted pregnancies and Sexually Transmissible Infections (STI’s).

For more information on safe sex, speak to your parents or a health professional.

More Information:
If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to ask. More information can be obtained from the following:

- CHOC Phone (03) 364 1821
- Clinical Outpatient Co-ordinator Phone (03) 364 1821
- CHOC Pharmacist Phone (03) 364 0640 Pager 8259
- Shared Care Nurse Phone (03) 364 1899