of other infections as well.

Occasionally rituximab can cause chest pain or an irregular heart beat. You should let your health care provider know if either of these occurs.

What should I tell my health care provider before beginning rituximab?
You should let your health care practitioner know if you have ever had reactions to rituximab in the past, or if you have an infection that won’t go away. You should not have live vaccines while on rituximab, since it is likely that they will not work as well. Tell your health care provider if you have heart or lung problems, or if you are planning to become pregnant. It is not known if rituximab affects pregnancy or breast feeding, so both of these should be avoided while on this medication.
What is rituximab?
Rituximab (Rituxan®) is an FDA-approved medication for the treatment of lymphoma, as well as for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. The medication has recently been tested as a treatment for patients with active multiple sclerosis, as well as for a variety of immune system disorders. Rituximab is not yet approved by the FDA for multiple sclerosis treatment.

What does rituximab do?
Rituximab destroys immune cells known as B cells by a variety of methods. It is specific in this action and does not have a major effect on other parts of the immune system. The effect of rituximab appears to last for months.

How is rituximab given?
Rituximab is generally given as two intravenous (needle in a vein) treatments (infusions). The treatments are separated by a space of two weeks. The infusions are typically repeated every 6 months. An infusion takes about 5 to 6 hours. At the Mellen Center, we usually give patients acetaminophen, diphenhydramine, and an IV dose of Solu-Medrol® (steroid medication) before each treatment to reduce the risk of reactions to the rituximab.

What are the side effects of rituximab infusions?
Common side effects during rituximab infusions include:
- fever
- chills
- itching
- cough
- headache
- nausea
- hives
- sneezing
- throat irritation.

Premedication may reduce these side effects. Other side effects include:
- aching joints
- decreased blood counts
- lung problems
- upper respiratory tract infections (throat infections).

Please let your health care practitioner know about any side effects you experience.

Rare but important side effects have occurred with rituximab. In patients taking rituximab for cancer and autoimmune disorders such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, there have been cases of progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML). This is a rare brain infection that can cause death or disability. PML usually happens in patients with weakened immune systems. There is no known cure for this infection. Let your health care practitioner know if you develop new or worsened problems thinking, seeing, walking, or if you have other new neurological problems lasting days or weeks.

Occasionally, patients experience severe skin reactions, including ulcers in the mouth, blistering, or peeling skin. Tell your health care practitioner if you have any such reactions.

Patients with hepatitis B infections in the past may have an increase in the activity of this disease with rituximab. Let your health care practitioner know if you have ever had hepatitis B in the past.

Rituximab can increase the risk