

# Azathioprine

## Post Solid Organ Transplant Shared Care Guideline

Using a printed guideline?  
Always check you are using  
the most up to date version.  
See [www.ipnsm.hscni.net](http://www.ipnsm.hscni.net)

Specialist Details	
Name:	_____
Location:	_____
Tel:	_____

Patient Identifier	
Date:	_____

### Introduction

**Licensed indication:** immunosuppression post organ transplant.

Azathioprine is no longer routinely used as first line post transplant. Previous transplant patients established will remain on azathioprine. Azathioprine is never prescribed concurrently with mycophenolate mofetil.

**Adult dosage and administration:**

- **Post renal transplant:** The dose used may approach 2mg/kg in those patients on azathioprine and prednisolone alone.
- **Post liver transplant:** approximately 1mg/kg taken once daily, rounded to the nearest 25mg dose.

**Available as:** azathioprine 25mg, 50mg tablets

### Hospital Specialist Responsibilities

- Agree shared care with the patient's GP
- Send a copy of this guideline to the GP.
- Provide patient/carer with relevant information on use, side effects and need for monitoring of medication
- Baseline tests and ongoing safety monitoring:
  - FBC
  - LFT
  - U&E
  - Urinalysis
  - Lipids
  - Blood glucose
  - Blood pressure
- Drug monitoring and azathioprine dose adjustments.
- Review results of safety monitoring and request additional tests as necessary.
- Investigate, as appropriate, where symptoms suggest viral or fungal infections or possible tumours.
- Provide any other information or advice for the GP if required

### GP Responsibilities

- Prescribe azathioprine.
- Monitor patient's overall health and wellbeing.
- The Liver Unit may occasionally request tests to be repeated at the GP practice but will provide specific advice on this and the process to follow.
- Identify and report any adverse drug reactions to the initiating specialist and usual bodies (e.g. MHRA/CHM)
- Ensure no drug interactions with other medicines.
- Administer **inactivated** influenza vaccine annually unless otherwise advised by the initiating specialist.
- Check patient has had ONE DOSE of pneumococcal vaccine (revaccination is not recommended except every five years in patients whose antibody levels are likely to have declined more rapidly e.g. asplenia) - see BNF or Green Book.
- Passive immunisation using Varicella immunoglobulin (VZIG) should be considered in non-immune patients if exposed to chickenpox or shingles. Contact Regional Virus Laboratory, Royal Group of Hospitals for advice if exposure is suspected.
- Ask about oral ulceration/sore throat, unexplained rash or unusual bruising at every consultation.

**GP Responsibilities (continued)**

- **Suspected non-compliance** with immunosuppression is serious and can lead to loss of the graft - refer to the specialist urgently.

**Adverse Effects, Precautions and Contraindications**

**General** signs of malaise, dizziness, diarrhoea, rash, myalgia and arthralgia can occur infrequently. If severe or persistent, refer to the initiating specialist.

**Acute Kidney Injury (AKI):** Transplant patients are at increased risk of developing AKI. ACEI, ARBs, and NSAIDs should be withheld in situations of hypotension/hypovolaemia (GAIN,2014)

**Infection:** immunosuppressants can increase susceptibility to infection.

**Nausea** can occur initially, but can be reduced by taking the tablets after food or separate from prednisolone.

**Blood disorders:** Leucopenia, anaemia and thrombocytopenia: are most likely to be discovered in the transplant clinic. GPs should be alert to any oral ulceration / sore throat, unexplained rash or abnormal bruising or bleeding.

**Pancreatitis** has been reported in a small percentage of patients.

**Cancer risk.** Patients receiving long-term immunosuppressive drugs are at increased risk of developing a malignancy. The most frequently occurring types are lymphoma and skin malignancy. The avoidance of excessive exposure to the sun, and the use of high factor sunscreen and protective clothing are advised. Adherence to population screening programmes is particularly important in this population.

**Pregnancy / Contraception.** Patients discovered or planning to become pregnant should be referred to the specialist at the earliest opportunity. Initially post-transplant, barrier contraception is the preferred method of contraception, but at a later stage the combined oral contraceptive is a suitable option for transplant recipients. Intra-uterine devices are not suitable for this group of patients.

**Breastfeeding.** Patients should not breastfeed while receiving azathioprine.

**Acute interstitial nephritis** is a rarely described complication of azathioprine but indicates immediate withdrawal of the drug. Any rise in serum creatinine of >20% should be referred urgently to the specialist.

**Vaccines:** Live vaccines should be avoided, except on the advice of initiating specialist.

**Common Drug Interactions**

**The interactions listed below relate to azathioprine. Consideration should be given to the other agents used as part of a regime.**

The degree of renal / hepatic function should be taken into consideration when co-prescribing for transplant patients.

**The following drugs should not be initiated by a GP unless discussed with the specialist:**

**Do not prescribe** concomitant **allopurinol** or **febuxostat**.

**Ribavirin:** increases risk of myelosuppression

**Rifampicin** may reduce the efficacy of azathioprine and lead to transplant rejection.

**Trimethoprim and co-trimoxazole:** there is a risk of haematological abnormalities

**Warfarin** effect may be reduced requiring an increased dose.

**Communication**

**Renal Units**

Altnagelvin Hospital: Renal Unit	028 7161 1162
Antrim Hospital: Renal Unit	028 9442 4894 or 028 9442 4472
Belfast City Hospital: Renal Unit	028 9504 0719
Daisy Hill Hospital: Renal Unit	028 3083 5036
Tyrone County Hospital: Renal Unit	028 8283 3350
Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children: Dialysis Unit	028 9063 6621
Ulster Hospital: Renal Unit	028 9056 4839

**Liver Unit**

Royal Victoria Hospital	028 9063 3182
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This information is not inclusive of all prescribing information and potential adverse effects. Please refer to full prescribing data in the SPC or the BNF

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