

## WHO-PQ RECOMMENDED SUMMARY OF PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS

*This summary of product characteristics focuses on uses of the medicine covered by WHO's Prequalification Team - Medicines. The recommendations for use are based on WHO guidelines and on information from stringent regulatory authorities.\**

*The medicine may be authorised for additional or different uses by national medicines regulatory authorities.*

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\*[https://extranet.who.int/pqweb/sites/default/files/documents/75%20SRA%20clarification\\_Feb2017\\_newtempl.pdf](https://extranet.who.int/pqweb/sites/default/files/documents/75%20SRA%20clarification_Feb2017_newtempl.pdf)

## 1. NAME OF THE MEDICINAL PRODUCT

[MA186 trade name]<sup>†</sup>

## 2. QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE COMPOSITION

Each vial contains: artesunate powder 120 mg

Each ampoule of solvent contains: 2 mL of sodium bicarbonate 50 mg/mL solution

Each ampoule of diluent contains: 10 mL of sodium chloride 9 mg/mL solution

*Excipients with potential clinical effect*

Each ampoule of sodium bicarbonate injection contains 27.4 mg (1.2 mmol) sodium.

Each ampoule of sodium chloride injection contains 35.4 mg (1.5 mmol) sodium. See section 4-4.

## 3. PHARMACEUTICAL FORM

Artesunate powder for injection: a fine, white, crystalline powder

Sodium bicarbonate injection: clear, colourless liquid

Sodium chloride injection: clear, colourless liquid

## 4. CLINICAL PARTICULARS

### 4.1 Therapeutic indications

[MA186 trade name], administered intravenously or intramuscularly, is indicated for the treatment of severe malaria caused by *Plasmodium falciparum*.

Treatment regimens should take into account the most recent official treatment guidelines (e.g. those of the WHO) and local information on the prevalence of resistance to antimalarial drugs.

### 4.2 Posology and method of administration

#### *Posology*

After reconstitution to the appropriate strength, [MA186 trade name] is given by slow intravenous or intramuscular injection for a minimum of 3 doses given over 24 hours. Doses of artesunate depend on body weight and higher proportional doses are recommended in children weighing less than 20 kg, in whom exposure is lower than in adults and older children:

Adults and children weighing 20 kg or more:	2.4 mg/kg
Children weighing less than 20 kg:	3 mg/kg

A dose should be given at admission (0 hours), then at 12 and 24 hours after admission. Further doses may then be given once daily as necessary, until the patient can tolerate oral therapy.

Treatment should then be completed with an oral artemisinin-based combination regimen given for 3 days. The first oral dose should be taken 8 to 12 hours after the last injection of artesunate.

Where complete treatment of severe malaria is not possible, but [MA186 trade name] injections are available, adults and children may be given a single intramuscular dose of artesunate before referral to an appropriate facility for further care.

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<sup>†</sup> Trade names are not prequalified by WHO. This is the national medicines regulatory agency's responsibility.

## **Hepatic and renal impairment**

Dose adjustment is not necessary in patients with hepatic or renal impairment (see Sections 4.4 and 5.2).

### ***Method of administration***

For instructions on reconstitution of [MA186 trade name] before administration, see section 6.6. The injection solution should be freshly prepared before each dose is given and should not be stored.

[MA186 trade name] injection is given by intravenous bolus injection over 1 to 2 minutes or by slow intramuscular injection into the anterior thigh. If the total volume of solution to be injected intramuscularly is large (more than 2 mL for small children or 5 mL for adults), it may be preferable to divide the volume and inject it at multiple sites, e.g., both thighs.

## **4.3 Contraindications**

[MA186 trade name] is contraindicated in patients with hypersensitivity to artesunate or other artemisinins or to any of the components of the formulation listed in section 6.1.

## **4.4 Special warnings and precautions for use**

### ***Non-falciparum malaria***

Artesunate has not been evaluated in the treatment of severe malaria due to *Plasmodium vivax*, *Plasmodium malariae* or *Plasmodium ovale* (see also section 5.1)

### ***Post-treatment haemolytic anaemia***

Delayed haemolytic anaemia following treatment with injectable artesunate has been observed in children in malaria endemic areas and in non-immune travelers presenting with severe *falciparum* malaria. Onset has typically occurred at least 7 days and sometimes several weeks after starting artesunate treatment. The risk was most pronounced in patients with hyperparasitaemia and in younger children. Some cases have been severe and required blood transfusion.

Vigilance for delayed onset anaemia is therefore advised, particularly in hyperparasitaemic patients and younger children, and prolonged follow-up should be considered (e.g. 14-28 days). The overall benefit-risk ratio remains highly favourable for injectable artesunate in the treatment of severe malaria, and such treatment continues to be recommended.

### ***Reticulocytopenia***

The artemisinins have shown direct inhibitory effects on human erythroid precursors *in vitro* and inhibit bone marrow responses (especially red blood cell precursors) in animal models. Both animal preclinical data and human data from clinical trials have suggested that reversible reticulocytopenia occurs at least commonly in association with treatment with intravenous artesunate (see section 4.8).

The reticulocyte count recovers after cessation of treatment.

### ***Hepatic / renal impairment:***

Data regarding artesunate pharmacokinetics in patients with hepatic and/or renal impairment are limited. Based on data from studies in patients with severe malaria, as well as the known metabolism of artesunate (see Section 5.2), dosage adjustment is not considered necessary in patients with hepatic or renal impairment.

### ***Paediatric population***

In clinical trials, the efficacy and safety of intravenous and intramuscular artesunate have been similar in adult and paediatric populations.

### ***Excipients***

Each 2 ml of sodium bicarbonate injection contains 100 mg of sodium bicarbonate, equivalent to 27.4 mg (1.2 mmol) sodium.

Each 10 ml of sodium chloride injection contains 90 mg of sodium chloride, equivalent to 35.4 mg (1.5 mmol) sodium.

This medicine contains 27.4 mg sodium (main component of cooking/table salt) in each ampoule of sodium bicarbonate solution and 35.4 mg sodium in each ampoule of sodium chloride solution. This is equivalent to 3% of the recommended maximum daily dietary intake of sodium for an adult.

#### 4.5 Interaction with other medicinal products and other forms of interaction

After intravenous administration, artesunate is rapidly and extensively converted to DHA, largely by plasma and erythrocyte esterases.

DHA is converted to inactive glucuronide conjugates primarily by UGT1A9. DHA elimination is also rapid (half-life approximately 45 minutes) so the potential for drug-drug interactions appears limited. However, co-administration of intravenous artesunate with strong inhibitors of UGT enzymes (e.g. axitinib, vandetanib, imatinib, diclofenac) may increase plasma exposures to DHA.

In vitro drug-interaction studies have demonstrated minimal effects of artesunate on cytochrome P450 isoenzymes. Few clinical drug-drug interaction studies have been performed but limited data from *in vitro* studies and from clinical drug-drug interaction studies with oral artesunate and/or oral DHA have indicated that DHA induces CYP3A and inhibits CYP1A2.

An increase in plasma concentrations of artesunate was observed with nevirapine and a reduced plasma concentration of dihydroartemisinin was observed when artesunate was given with ritonavir.

#### 4.6 Fertility, pregnancy and breast-feeding

##### *Pregnancy*

Severe malaria is especially hazardous during pregnancy, therefore full dose parenteral artesunate treatment should be administered at any stage of pregnancy without delay.

In animal studies, artesunate has been associated with fetal toxicity during the first trimester of pregnancy. Limited clinical experience with the use of artesunate in the first trimester of pregnancy as well as clinical data from more than 4,000 pregnant women, treated with artemisinin derivatives in the second and third trimester, do not indicate adverse effects of artesunate on pregnancy or on the health of the fetus/newborn child.

##### *Breast-feeding*

Limited information indicates that dihydroartemisinin, the active metabolite of artesunate, is present at low levels in breast milk. Patients with severe malaria may be too ill to breast-feed, but in any case the levels of metabolite present in breast milk are not expected to cause any adverse effects in breastfed infants. The amount of drug present in breast milk does not protect the infant from malaria.

##### *Fertility*

No specific studies with artesunate in humans have been conducted to evaluate effects on fertility. In a reproduction toxicity study in rats, testicular and epididymal lesions were seen, but there were no effects on fertility (see section 5.3). The relevance of this finding for humans is unknown.

#### 4.7 Effects on ability to drive and use machines

There is no information on the effect of artesunate on the ability to drive or use machines. The patient's clinical status should be considered when assessing ability to drive or operate machinery.

#### 4.8 Undesirable effects

The most important reported side effect of artesunate is a rare severe allergic reaction (estimated risk approximately 1 in 3000 patients), which has involved urticarial rash as well as other symptoms, including hypotension, pruritus, oedema, and/or dyspnoea.

More common minor side effects associated with IV administration have included dizziness, light-headedness, rash, and taste alteration (metallic/ bitter taste). Nausea, vomiting, anorexia and diarrhea have also been reported, however it is uncertain whether such events have been symptoms of severe malaria.

Adverse events considered at least possibly related to artesunate are listed below by body system, organ class and absolute frequency. Frequencies are defined as very common ( $\geq 1/10$ ), common ( $1/100$ – $1/10$ ), uncommon ( $1/1000$ – $1/100$ ), rare ( $1/10\,000$ – $1/1000$ ), and very rare ( $< 1/10\,000$ ).

#### **Blood and lymphatic systems disorders**

Common	post-treatment haemolytic anaemia*, mild and transient decrease in reticulocyte count
Uncommon	neutropenia and anaemia (both occasionally severe), thrombocytopenia
Very rare	pure red cell aplasia

#### **Nervous system disorders**

Common	dizziness, light-headedness, headache, insomnia, tinnitus (with or without decrease in auditory function)
Very rare	peripheral neuropathy (or paraesthesia)

#### **Cardiac disorders**

Common	bradycardia
Frequency not known	QT prolongation

#### **Vascular disorders**

Common	hypotension, phlebitis
Uncommon	flushing

#### **Respiratory disorders**

Common	cough, nasal symptoms
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#### **Gastrointestinal disorders**

Common	altered taste, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain or cramps, diarrhoea
Uncommon	constipation
Rare	raised serum amylase, pancreatitis

#### **Hepatobiliary disorders**

Common	transient rises in liver transaminases (AST, ALT), hyperbilirubinaemia, jaundice
Rare	hepatitis

#### **Skin and subcutaneous tissue disorders**

Common	rash, alopecia
Uncommon	Stevens-Johnson syndrome, pruritus, urticaria

#### **Musculoskeletal and connective tissue disorders**

Common	arthralgia, muscle disorders
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#### **General disorders and administration site conditions**

Common	fatigue, malaise, fever, pain at injection site
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#### **Immune system disorders**

Uncommon	hypersensitivity
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*\*Post-treatment anaemia*

Cases of delayed haemolytic anaemia have been identified in non-immune travelers following treatment of severe malaria with injectable artesunate. Some were severe and required blood transfusions. In a study in African children aged 6 months to 10 years of age in malaria endemic areas, 5 out of 72 children (7%) experienced delayed haemolytic anaemia following treatment with injectable artesunate, and one child required transfusion. Risk was increased with hyperparasitaemia in all age groups and with younger age in children. Onset of haemolysis and anaemia was evident by 14-28 days after artesunate treatment. Vigilance for this adverse event is advised.

*Paediatric population:*

The safety profile of injectable artesunate is similar in children and adults.

**Reporting of suspected adverse reactions**

Health care providers are asked to report adverse reactions that may be linked to a medicine, to the marketing authorisation holder, or, if available, to the national reporting system. Reports of suspected adverse reactions to a medicine are important for the monitoring of the medicine's benefits and risks.

## **4.9 Overdose**

Experience of acute overdose with artesunate is limited. A case of overdose has been documented in a 5 year-old child who was inadvertently administered rectal artesunate at a dose of 88 mg/kg/day over 4 days, representing a dose more than 7-fold higher than the highest recommended artesunate dose. The overdose was associated with pancytopenia, melena, seizures, multi-organ failure and death.

Treatment of overdose should consist of general supportive measures.

# **5. PHARMACOLOGICAL PROPERTIES**

## **5.1 Pharmacodynamic properties**

Pharmacotherapeutic group: Antimalaria, ATC code: P01BE03

*Mechanism of action*

Artesunate is a hemisuccinate derivative of dihydroartemisinin, which is itself formed by the reduction of artemisinin. Artemisinin is a sesquiterpene lactone endoperoxide extracted from qinghao (sweet wormwood, *Artemisia annua L.*), a plant which has been used for centuries in traditional Chinese medicine.

The mechanism of action of the artemisinins likely involves cleavage of the internal endoperoxide bridge through reaction with haeme within the infected erythrocyte, thereby generating free radicals which alkylate vital parasite proteins. However, artemisinins have also been reported to inhibit an essential parasite calcium adenosine triphosphatase.

The artemisinins are distinguished from other antimalarials by their ability to kill all erythrocytic stages of the malaria parasite, including the relatively inactive ring stage and late schizonts, as well as the gametocytes responsible for malaria transmission. Artesunate and the artemisinins are the most rapid acting of the antimalarials, and they have also been shown to enhance splenic clearance of infected erythrocytes by reducing cytoadherence.

*In vitro*, dihydroartemisinin (DHA), the active metabolite of artesunate, exhibits similar potency against chloroquine-resistant and chloroquine-sensitive clones of *P. falciparum*.

Artesunate and the other artemisinins are essentially inactive against extra-erythrocytic forms, sporozoites, liver schizonts or merozoites.

*Clinical efficacy and safety*

In the SEAQUAMAT (South East Asian Quinine Artesunate Malaria Trial), an international randomised, open-label, multicenter trial conducted in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Myanmar, 1461 patients with

severe malaria (including 1259 adults) were treated intravenously with either artesunate or quinine. Artesunate was administered at 2.4 mg/kg IV at 0, 12 and 24 h and then every 24 h until the patient could tolerate oral medication. Quinine was given IV at 20 mg/kg over 4 hours, followed by 10 mg/kg over 2-8 hours, 3 times daily until oral therapy could be started. Mortality in the artesunate group was 15% versus 22% in the quinine group, for a reduction in risk of death of 34.7% ( $p=0.0002$ ). Subgroup analysis suggested a greater benefit of artesunate versus quinine in patients with parasitaemia  $>10\%$ . The reduction in mortality observed in the 202 paediatric patients ( $<15$  years of age) appeared consistent with the overall results, however the number of children was too small to demonstrate statistical significance. Post-treatment hypoglycaemia was more common in the quinine-treated group.

### Paediatrics

The AQUAMAT (African Quinine Artesunate Malaria Trial) was an international, randomized open-label multicenter trial which sought to extend the results of the SEAQUAMAT study by comparing parenteral artesunate versus IV quinine for severe malaria in 5425 African children ( $<15$  years) in 9 African countries (Mozambique, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, and Democratic Republic of the Congo). Dosing was similar to SEAQUAMAT, except that both artesunate and quinine could be administered either intravenously or intramuscularly, using the same doses for IM and IV administration for each drug. Roughly one third of patients received study drug by intramuscular injection. Mortality in the artesunate group was 8.5% compared to 10.9% in the quinine group, resulting in a relative risk reduction for death of 22.5% ( $p=0.0022$ ); the risk reduction was similar for IV and IM administration. In addition, although the risk of neurological sequelae in survivors in both groups did not differ significantly by 28 days following treatment, in-hospital coma, convulsions, and deterioration of coma were all less frequent in the artesunate-treated patients. As in the SEAQUAMAT, post-treatment hypoglycaemia was more common in the quinine-treated group.

## 5.2 Pharmacokinetic properties

No bioequivalence study was required due to the pharmaceutical formulation of [MA186 trade name]. Therefore, no pharmacokinetic data are available for this product.

### Pharmacokinetics of Artesunate

<b>Absorption</b>	
Oral bioavailability	Not applicable
Food effect	Not applicable
<b>Distribution</b>	
Volume of distribution (mean)	Artesunate: 15 L/kg Dihydroartemisinin: 1.6-2.6 L/kg
Plasma protein binding in vitro	Artesunate: 75% Dihydroartemisinin: 80-90% with decreased binding at higher concentrations
Tissue distribution	Dihydroartemisinin accumulates substantially in <i>P. falciparum</i> -infected erythrocytes
<b>Metabolism</b>	
	Extensively hydrolysed by plasma esterases and perhaps also by CYP2A6.
Active metabolite(s)	Dihydroartemisinin is further metabolised through glucuronidation
<b>Elimination</b>	
Elimination half life	Artesunate: 3–29 minutes

	Dihydroartemisinin: 40–95 minutes
Mean systemic clearance (Cl/F)	Artesunate: 20 L/kg/h Dihydroartemisinin: 1.4 – 2.7 L/kg/h
% of dose excreted in urine	NA*
% of dose excreted in faeces	NA*

\*Information not available.

### 5.3 Preclinical safety data

#### *General toxicity*

Artesunate presents low acute toxicity. After repeated administration of 50 mg/kg/day in rats and 82.5 mg/kg/day in dogs, i.e. approximately 10 and 17 times the proposed maximal therapeutic dose in man, evidence of toxicity was observed in the haematopoietic organs, the immune system and response, the liver and kidneys.

#### *Genotoxicity*

Artesunate did not show any mutagenic or clastogenic potential in in vitro and in vivo tests (Ames, mouse micronucleus).

#### *Carcinogenesis*

No studies of the carcinogenic potential of artesunate have been conducted.

#### *Reproductive toxicology studies*

Oral artesunate caused dose-dependent fetal toxicity in rats, rabbits, and monkeys, resulting in fetal resorption and abortion, as well as a low incidence of cardiac and skeletal defects. The no-observed-adverse-effect-level (NOAEL) was 12 mg/kg in pregnant monkeys (3- and 7-day exposures) and the no or low adverse effects level was 5-7 mg/kg in pregnant rats or rabbits (12-day exposures), both of which are above the therapeutic dose range (2.4-4.8 mg/kg) and expected duration of exposure for treatment of severe malaria in humans. In rats, the embryo-fetuses were most sensitive from gestational days 9-14; at other times embryotoxicity was significantly reduced. A study of artesunate administered to male rats daily for 6 weeks noted testicular and epididymal lesions, although these lesions did not affect fertility. The lesions were reversible after cessation of treatment.

#### *Safety pharmacology studies*

A slight sedative effect, decrease in body temperature, mild natriuretic effect, and a decrease in creatinine clearance were observed with artesunate after single intravenous doses of 200 mg/kg (mice), 450 mg/kg (rats, rabbits and dogs), and following single oral doses of 180 mg/kg in male rats. Beagle dogs administered IV artesunate at 10, 20 and 50 mg/kg for 14 days did not display significant clinical effects, including any signs of neurotoxicity, effects on body weight, ECG abnormalities (including QT interval changes), heart rate, blood pressure, or respiratory rate.

## 6. PHARMACEUTICAL PARTICULARS

### 6.1 List of excipients

Artesunate powder for injection: No excipients

Solvent: sodium bicarbonate and water for injection

Diluent: sodium chloride and water for injection



## 6.2 Incompatibilities

In the absence of compatibility studies, this medicinal product must not be mixed with other medicinal products

## 6.3 Shelf life

36 months

## 6.4 Special precautions for storage

Store below 30°C. Keep the vial and ampoules in the provided carton to protect the product from light. Do not refrigerate or freeze.

The reconstituted and diluted solutions should be stored below 30°C and the total in-use period should not exceed 1 hour.

## 6.5 Nature and contents of container

Artesunate for injection is a sterile, white, crystalline powder.

120 mg of artesunate are filled into a clear, 15-mL USP type I glass vial, sealed with a grey bromobutyl rubber stopper and an aluminium seal closed with a red-flip-off plastic cap embossed with “Ipca”.

Sodium bicarbonate injection is a sterile clear colourless liquid.

2 mL are filled into a clear USP type I glass ampoule with a white ring around the neck of the ampoule.

Sodium chloride injection is a sterile clear colourless liquid.

10 mL are filled into a clear USP type I glass ampoule with a white ring around the neck of the ampoule.

Pack size: A small box containing one vial of artesunate powder for injection, one ampoule of sodium bicarbonate injection and one ampoule of sodium chloride injection.

## 6.6 Instructions for reconstitution

When reconstituted correctly, one vial of [MA186 trade name] will yield 12 mL of a solution for intravenous administration (10 mg/mL) or 6 mL of a solution for intramuscular administration (20 mg/mL).

For patients weighing over 50 kg, more than 1 vial of [MA186 trade name] will be needed for each dose. The required number of product packs should be determined as follows.

Patient weight	Number of vials of artesunate (120 mg) needed
up to 50 kg	1
51 to 100 kg	2

- Using a syringe, withdraw 1 mL of the supplied sodium bicarbonate solvent from the ampoule and inject into the vial containing the artesunate powder.
- Shake the vial for several minutes to mix well until the powder is completely dissolved and the solution is clear. If the solution appears cloudy or a precipitate is present, it should be discarded.
- The reconstituted solution should then be diluted using the appropriate amount of supplied diluent (sodium chloride 0.9% for injection) according to the intended route of administration, as follows:

	For intravenous use	For intramuscular use
Volume of bicarbonate solvent	2 mL	2 mL
Volume of sodium chloride diluent	10 mL	4 mL
Total volume	12 mL	6 mL
Concentration of final artesunate solution	10 mg/mL	20 mg/mL

Once reconstituted, the artesunate solution must be used within one hour.

## 6.7 Special precautions for disposal and other handling

No special requirements

## 7. SUPPLIER

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## 8. WHO REFERENCE NUMBER (WHO Prequalification Programme)

MA186

## 9. DATE OF PREQUALIFICATION

05 September 2023

## 10. DATE OF REVISION OF THE TEXT

January 2024

Section 6 was updated in April 2025

## References

General

WHO Guidelines for malaria, 14 March 2023. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023. (WHO/UCN/GMP/ 2023.01; <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1493946/retrieve>, accessed 16 September 2023).

### 4.2 Posology and method of administration

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#### 4.4 Special warnings and precautions for use

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#### 4.8 Undesirable effects

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#### 4.9 Overdose

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#### 5.1 Pharmacodynamic properties

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#### 5.2 Pharmacokinetic properties

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### 5.3 Preclinical safety data

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Detailed information on this medicine is available on the World Health Organization (WHO) website:  
<https://extranet.who.int/pqweb/medicines>