Azithromycin for trachoma - information for health care providers

The antibiotic of choice for the prevention and treatment of trachoma is azithromycin. It belongs in the family of macrolide antibiotics which includes erythromycin, roxithromycin and clarithromycin. Azithromycin is better absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract, lasts longer in the body and gets into the cells better than the other macrolides.

Trachoma management
The World Health Organisation endorsed the SAFE strategy for the effective control of trachoma.

Surgery – surgical correction for trichiasis
Antibiotics - antibiotic treatment of cases and contacts of active trachoma

Facial Cleanliness – promote face and hand washing to reduce spread of infection
Environmental Health – improve water access, toilet hygiene and sanitation, waste and fly control and promote activities that reduce overcrowding.

Antibiotic treatment of trachoma
Antibiotic treatment of trachoma is thought to reduce the prevalence of active trachoma infection and therefore prevent the development of scarring and blindness. Azithromycin is the recommended treatment for all people diagnosed with trachoma as well as their contacts. A contact is anyone who is living and/or sleeping in the same house as a person with trachoma. If the person lives or sleeps in multiple households, then all members of each household are regarded as contacts.

Dosage of azithromycin
Preparation: 40mg/ml powder to be reconstituted with water, or 500mg tablet
Administration: orally as a single dose 20mg/kg (maximum dose 1000mg)

Dose for weight chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Azithromycin dose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3kg to &lt;6kg</td>
<td>80 mg (2ml)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6kg to &lt;10kg</td>
<td>160mg (4ml)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10kg to &lt;15kg</td>
<td>240mg (6ml)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 kg to &lt;20kg</td>
<td>400mg (10ml)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20kg to &lt;30kg</td>
<td>500mg (1 tablet OR 12.5ml §)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30kg to &lt;40kg</td>
<td>750mg (1 ½ tablets)³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 40kg adults</td>
<td>1000mg (2 tablets)³</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² 200mg/5ml suspension
³ 500mg tablet

Contraindications
Single dose azithromycin is contraindicated only in the case of a known allergy, and weight less than 3kg. In cases where allergy to azithromycin is present, doxycycline or tetracycline is recommended – check for contraindications for these medications and seek expert advice in children <8 years old.

Side effects
While not frequent some people may experience side effects including: diarrhoea, nausea, or abdominal pain. Headache, shortness of breath, rash or candida infection can occur rarely.
Trachoma screening
In regions where trachoma is endemic the minimum target group for trachoma screening is children aged 5-9 years. Trachoma screening and treatment should be undertaken in accordance with the National Guidelines for the Public Health Management of Trachoma (Communicable Disease Network of Australia). Where possible trachoma management programs should be conducted at a regional level. Screening and treatment at a population level is the best method to decrease the incidence of trachoma.

References

For more information contact the Centre for Disease Control in your region
Alice Springs  8951 7540
Darwin  8922 8044
Katherine  8973 9049
Nhulunbuy  8987 0357
Tennant Creek  8962 4259
or http//www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc