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Venclexta approved for specific genetic blood cancer

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(HealthDay)—Venclexta (venetoclax) has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) characterized by a specific chromosomal abnormality called the 17p deletion.

People with this abnormality lack a portion of a chromosome that thwarts cancer growth, the agency said in a news release. It occurs in 10 percent to 20 percent of people with CLL.

The newly approved drug targets the BCL-2 protein, which promotes cancer growth and often is overabundant in people with CLL, the FDA said.

Venclexta's effectiveness was tested in clinical studies involving 106 people with CLL who also had the 17p deletion abnormality. Some 80 percent of trial participants showed a complete or partial remission, the agency said.

The drug's most common side effects included low white blood cell count, diarrhea, nausea, anemia, upper respiratory infection, low blood platelet count and fatigue. More serious complications included pneumonia, fever and more severe anemia.

People who take Venclexta should not be given vaccines that involve a live but weakened germ, the FDA warned.

Venclexta is produced by AbbVie Inc. of North Chicago, Ill.

More information: Visit the FDA to learn more.

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