Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Ropeginterferon Alfa-2b

This information from UpToDate® Lexidrug™ explains what you need to know about this medication, including what it's used for, how to take it, its side effects, and when to call your healthcare provider.

## Brand Names: US

Besremi; Besremi Pen

## Brand Names: Canada

Besremi

## Warning

- This drug and drugs like it may cause new or worse mental health problems. This can be severe or even deadly. Suicide, suicidal thoughts, thoughts of hurting others, depression, hallucinations, aggressive actions, and other mood or behavior problems have happened. They have also happened up to 6 months after the last dose. Relapse of drug use disorder has also happened.
- This drug may cause new or worse infections, blood flow problems, or autoimmune diseases. Effects like blood pressure changes, abnormal heartbeat, chest pain, heart attacks, and strokes have happened. These can be severe or deadly.
- If you have signs of any of these health problems, call your doctor or get medical help right away. Many times, but not every time, these side effects get better after stopping this drug.

## What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat polycythemia vera.
- It is used to treat essential thrombocythemia.

## What do I need to tell my doctor BEFORE I take this drug?

- If you are allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell your doctor about the allergy and what signs you had.
- If you have or have ever had depression or thoughts of suicide.
- If you have an autoimmune disease.
- If you have had an organ transplant.
- If you have any of these health problems: Heart failure, high blood pressure, kidney disease, or liver disease.
- If you have an abnormal heartbeat, certain types of chest pain (angina), or other heart problems.
- If you have had a recent heart attack or stroke.
- If you are taking any drugs to suppress your immune system. This may be certain doses of steroids like prednisone. There are many drugs that can suppress your immune system. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- If you are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed while you take this drug and for 8 weeks after your last dose.

This is not a list of all drugs or health problems that interact with this drug.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all of your drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it is safe for you to take this drug with all of your drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug without checking with your doctor.

## What are some things I need to know or do while I take this drug?

- Tell all of your health care providers that you take this drug. This includes your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Avoid driving and doing other tasks or actions that call for you to be alert until you see how this drug affects you.
- Avoid alcohol, marijuana or other forms of cannabis, or prescription or OTC drugs that may slow your actions.
- Have your blood work checked and eye exams as you have been told by your doctor.
- High blood sugar has happened with this drug. This includes diabetes that is new or worse.
- Check your blood sugar as you have been told by your doctor.
- Tooth and gum problems have happened with this drug. This could lead to the loss of teeth. Dry mouth may also happen and can affect your teeth. Take good care of your teeth. See a dentist often.
- If you throw up, rinse your mouth out well.
- High cholesterol and triglyceride levels have happened with this drug. If you have high cholesterol or triglycerides, talk with your doctor.
- Low blood cell counts have happened with this drug. If blood cell counts get very low, this can lead to bleeding problems, infections, or anemia. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- If you are 65 or older, use this drug with care. You could have more side effects.
- This drug may cause harm to an unborn baby. A pregnancy test may be done before you start this drug to show that you are NOT pregnant.
- If you may become pregnant, use birth control while taking this drug and for 8 weeks after your last dose. If you get pregnant, call your doctor right away.

## What are some side effects that I need to call my doctor about right away?

**WARNING/CAUTION:** Even though it may be rare, some people may have very bad and sometimes deadly side effects when taking a drug. Tell your doctor or get medical help right away if you have any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

- Signs of an allergic reaction, like rash; hives; itching; red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin with or without fever; wheezing; tightness in the chest or throat; trouble breathing, swallowing, or talking; unusual hoarseness; or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue, or throat.
- Signs of depression, suicidal thoughts, emotional ups and downs, abnormal thinking, anxiety, or lack of interest in life.
- Signs of thyroid problems like change in weight; feeling nervous, excitable, restless, or weak; hair thinning; depression; eye or neck swelling; not able to focus; trouble with heat or cold; menstrual changes; shakiness; or sweating.
- Signs of a pancreas problem (pancreatitis) like very bad stomach pain, very bad back pain, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.
- Signs of liver problems like dark urine, tiredness, decreased appetite, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Signs of kidney problems like unable to pass urine, change in how much urine is passed, blood in the urine, or a big weight gain.
- Signs of high blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Signs of high blood sugar like confusion, feeling sleepy, unusual thirst or hunger, passing urine more often, flushing, fast breathing, or breath that smells like fruit.
- Signs of infection like fever, chills, or sweating; cough; muscle aches; shortness of breath; more sputum or change in color of sputum; red, warm, swollen, painful, or blistered skin; weight loss; stomach pain; diarrhea; pain with passing urine; or passing urine more often.

- Signs of lupus like a rash on the cheeks or other body parts, sunburn easy, muscle or joint pain, chest pain or shortness of breath, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Change in look of teeth or gums.
- No period or other period (menstrual) changes.
- Fast or abnormal heartbeat.
- Call your doctor or get medical help right away if you have signs of heart attack or stroke. This includes chest pain or pressure, shortness of breath, dizziness or passing out, severe headache, weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in eyesight or balance, or drooping on 1 side of the face.
- This drug may cause eye problems that may lead to loss of eyesight or blindness. Tell your doctor if you have or have ever had eye problems. Call your doctor right away if you have any changes in eyesight.
- Severe bowel problems (colitis) have happened with this drug and drugs like it. Very rarely, this can be life-threatening. This can happen as early as 12 weeks after starting treatment. Call your doctor right away if you have severe stomach pain, bloody diarrhea, throwing up blood, or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.
- Some people have had lung problems with this drug. Sometimes, this has been deadly. Call your doctor right away if you have signs of lung problems like shortness of breath or other trouble breathing, cough that is new or worse, or fever.

## What are some other side effects of this drug?

All drugs may cause side effects. However, many people have no side effects or only have minor side effects. Call your doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother you or do not go away:

- Back, bone, joint, or muscle pain.

- Feeling dizzy, tired, or weak.
- Flu-like signs.
- Nose or throat irritation.
- Signs of a common cold.
- Headache.
- Diarrhea, stomach pain, upset stomach, or decreased appetite.
- Sweating a lot.
- Hair loss.
- Pimples (acne).
- Skin irritation.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Strange or odd dreams.
- Irritation where the shot is given.
- Muscle spasm.

These are not all of the side effects that may occur. If you have questions about side effects, call your doctor. Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects.

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

You may report side effects to the FDA at 1-800-332-1088. You may also report side effects at https://www.fda.gov/medwatch.

## How is this drug best taken?

Use this drug as ordered by your doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

- It is given as a shot into the fatty part of the skin on the top of the thigh or the belly area.
- If you will be giving yourself the shot, your doctor or nurse will teach you

how to give the shot.

- Wash your hands before and after use.
- Before using this drug, take it out of the refrigerator. Allow to reach room temperature (15 to 30 minutes). Do not heat this drug.
- Do not take this drug out of the carton while it comes to room temperature.
- Do not use if the solution is cloudy, leaking, or has particles.
- Do not use if solution changes color.
- Move the site where you give the shot with each shot.
- Do not give into skin that is irritated, bruised, red, infected, hard, or scarred.
- Do not give into skin within 2 inches (5 cm) of the belly button.
- Each prefilled syringe or pen is for one use only. Throw away any part left over after the dose is given.
- Throw away needles in a needle/sharp disposal box. Do not reuse needles or other items. When the box is full, follow all local rules for getting rid of it. Talk with a doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.

## What do I do if I miss a dose?

- Call your doctor to find out what to do.
- Do not take more than 1 dose of this drug every 2 weeks unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

## How do I store and/or throw out this drug?

- Store in a refrigerator. Do not freeze.
- Store in the original container to protect from light.
- Protect from heat.
- Keep all drugs in a safe place. Keep all drugs out of the reach of children and pets.
- Throw away unused or expired drugs. Do not flush down a toilet or pour down a drain unless you are told to do so. Check with your pharmacist if you

have questions about the best way to throw out drugs. There may be drug take-back programs in your area.

## General drug facts

- If your symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your doctor.
- Do not share your drugs with others and do not take anyone else's drugs.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- This drug comes with an extra patient fact sheet called a Medication Guide. Read it with care. Read it again each time this drug is refilled. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with the doctor, pharmacist, or other health care provider.
- If you think there has been an overdose, call your poison control center or get medical care right away. Be ready to tell or show what was taken, how much, and when it happened.

## Consumer Information Use and Disclaimer

This generalized information is a limited summary of diagnosis, treatment, and/or medication information. It is not meant to be comprehensive and should be used as a tool to help the user understand and/or assess potential diagnostic and treatment options. It does NOT include all information about conditions, treatments, medications, side effects, or risks that may apply to a specific patient. It is not intended to be medical advice or a substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of a health care provider based on the health care provider's examination and assessment of a patient's specific and unique circumstances. Patients must speak with a health care provider for complete information about their health, medical questions, and treatment options, including any risks or benefits regarding use of medications. This information does not endorse any treatments or medications as safe, effective, or approved for treating a specific patient. UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates disclaim any warranty or liability relating to this information or the use thereof. The use of

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If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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