PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Azithromycin (Systemic

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

Zithromax; Zithromax Tri-Pak; Zithromax Z-Pak

Brand Names: Canada

AG-Azithromycin; APO-Azithromycin Z; AURO-Azithromycin; GEN-Azithromycin; JAMP-Azithromycin; M-Azithromycin; Mar-Azithromycin; NRA-Azithromycin; PMS-Azithromycin; PRO-Azithromycin; RATIO-Azithromycin; RIVA-Azithromycin; SANDOZ Azithromycin; TEVA-Azithromycin; Zithromax [DSC]

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat or prevent bacterial infections.

What do I need to tell the doctor BEFORE my child takes this drug?

All products:

- If your child is allergic to this drug; any part of this drug; or any other drugs, foods, or substances. Tell the doctor about the allergy and what signs your child had.
- If your child has turned yellow or has had liver side effects with this drug before.
- If your child has any of these health problems: Long QTc on ECG or other heartbeat that is not normal, slow heartbeat, or low potassium or magnesium levels.
- If your child has heart failure (weak heart).
- If your child has ever had a certain type of abnormal heartbeat (torsades de pointes).
- If your child is taking any drugs that can cause a certain type of heartbeat that is not normal (prolonged QT interval). There are many drugs that can do this. Ask the doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.

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

Tell the doctor and pharmacist about all of your child's drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) and health problems. You must check to make sure that it

is safe to give this drug with all of your child's other drugs and health problems. Do not start, stop, or change the dose of any drug your child takes without checking with the doctor.

All oral products:

- If your child has cystic fibrosis, a weak immune system, an infection in the blood, an infection your child got in the hospital, or if your child is in the hospital.

What are some things I need to know or do while my child takes this drug?

- Tell all of your child's health care providers that your child is taking this drug. This includes your child's doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists.
- Do not give to your child longer than you have been told. A second infection may happen.
- Severe heart rhythm changes like prolonged QT interval have happened with this drug. Sometimes, these can be life-threatening or deadly. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- If your child has myasthenia gravis, talk with the doctor. Call the doctor if your child's signs get worse. Signs of myasthenia gravis have also happened in people who do not have it. Call the doctor right away if your child has

new or worse muscle weakness, trouble chewing or swallowing, trouble breathing, droopy eyelids, or change in eyesight like blurred eyesight or seeing double.

If your child is pregnant or breast-feeding a baby:

- Talk with the doctor if your child is pregnant, becomes pregnant, or is breast-feeding a baby. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks to your child and the baby.
- If your child is breast-feeding a baby, tell the doctor if your child's baby throws up, has diarrhea, gets irritable, or gets a rash with feeding.

What are some side effects that I need to call my child's 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 child's doctor or get medical help right away if your child has any of the following signs or symptoms that may be related to a very bad side effect:

For all patients taking this drug:

- 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.

- Chest pain or pressure, a fast heartbeat, or an abnormal heartbeat.
- Dizziness or passing out.
- Change in hearing.
- Fever.
- Change in eyesight.
- Diarrhea is common with antibiotics. Sometimes, diarrhea may be caused by a certain bowel infection (C diff). C diff may happen during treatment or within a few months after the last dose. This infection can be severe or even deadly. Call your child's doctor right away if your child has stomach cramps, fever, long-lasting diarrhea, very loose or watery stools, or bloody stools. Check with your child's doctor before treating diarrhea.
- Liver problems have happened with this drug. Rarely, this has been deadly. Call the doctor right away if your child has 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.
- Severe skin reactions may happen with this drug. These

include Stevens-Johnson syndrome (SJS), toxic epidermal necrolysis (TEN), and other serious reactions. Sometimes, body organs may also be affected. These reactions can be deadly. Get medical help right away if your child has signs like red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin; red or irritated eyes; sores in the mouth, throat, nose, eyes, genitals, or any areas of skin; fever; chills; body aches; shortness of breath; or swollen glands.

Newborns:

- A severe stomach problem has happened in newborns (up to 42 days old) taking this drug. Call the doctor right away if your baby throws up, has diarrhea, gets irritable, or gets a rash with feeding.

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 child's doctor or get medical help if any of these side effects or any other side effects bother your child or do not go away:

All products:

- Diarrhea, stomach pain, upset stomach, or throwing up.
- Headache.

Injection:

- Pain where the shot was given.

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

You may report side effects to your national health agency.

How is this drug best given?

Give this drug as ordered by your child's doctor. Read all information given to you. Follow all instructions closely.

All oral products:

- Give with or without food. Give with food if it causes your child to have an upset stomach.
- Do not give antacids that have magnesium or aluminum at the same time as this drug. Talk with the doctor or pharmacist.
- Keep giving this drug to your child as you have been told by your child's doctor or other health care provider, even if your child feels well.

Liquid (suspension):

- Shake well before use.
- Measure liquid doses carefully. Use the measuring device that comes with this drug. If there is none, ask the pharmacist for a device to measure this drug.

Packets:

- Empty powder packet into 2 ounces (60 mL) of water. Mix well and give to your child to drink. Rinse cup with 2 more ounces (60 mL) of water and have your child drink to be sure all of this drug is taken.

Injection:

- It is given as an infusion into a vein over a period of time.

What do I do if my child misses a dose?

Tablets and liquid (suspension):

- Give a missed dose as soon as you think about it.
- If it is close to the time for your child's next dose, skip the missed dose and go back to your child's normal time.
- Do not give 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.

Packets:

- Only 1 dose of this drug is needed. If your child missed the dose, give it as soon as you think about it.

Injection:

- Call your child's doctor to find out what to do.

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

Liquid (suspension):

- Store liquid (suspension) at room temperature or in a refrigerator. Throw away any unused portion after 10 days.
- Store in original container.
- Keep lid tightly closed.
- Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.

All other oral products:

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.

Injection:

- If you need to store this drug at home, talk with your child's doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about how to store it.

All products:

- 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 child's symptoms or health problems do not get better or if they become worse, call your child's doctor.
- Do not share your child's drug with others and do not give anyone else's drug to your child.
- Some drugs may have another patient information leaflet. If you have any questions about this drug, please talk with your child's doctor, nurse, 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 this information is governed by the Terms of Use, available at https://www.wolterskluwer.com/en/know/clinical-effectiveness-terms.

Last Reviewed Date

2026-09-17

Copyright

© 2026 UpToDate, Inc. and its affiliates and/or licensors. All rights reserved.

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.

Azithromycin (Systemic - Last updated on December 12, 2022

All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center



Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center