PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Dexamethasone (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

Dexabliss [DSC]; dexAMETHasone Intensol; Dexlyt; DoubleDex; Dxevo 11-Day [DSC]; Hemady; HiDex 6-Day; MAS Care-Pak; TaperDex 12-Day; TaperDex 6-Day; TaperDex 7-Day; TopiDex; ZCORT 7-Day [DSC]

Brand Names: Canada

APO-Dexamethasone; Dexamethasone Omega Unidose; Dexamethasone-Omega; Odan-Dexamethasone; PMS-Dexamethasone

What is this drug used for?

- It is used for many health problems like allergy signs, asthma, adrenal gland problems, blood problems, skin rashes, or swelling problems. This is not a list of all health problems that this drug may be used for. Talk with the doctor.

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

- 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 an infection. This includes bacterial, viral, and fungal infections; amoeba infection (like traveler's diarrhea); herpes infection of the eye; malaria infection in the brain; threadworm infestation; or any other infection.

- If your child has nerve problems in the eye.
- If your child has any stomach or bowel problems. This includes diverticulitis, ulcerative colitis, ulcers, or recent bowel surgery.

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.

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

All products:

- 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.
- Have your child's blood work checked as you have been told by the doctor. Your child may also need to have eye pressure and bone density checked if this drug is used for a long time.
- This drug may affect certain lab tests. Tell all of your child's health care providers and lab workers that your child takes this drug.
- High blood pressure has happened with drugs like this one. Have your child's blood pressure checked as you have been told by the doctor.
- This drug may affect allergy skin tests. Be sure the doctor and lab workers know your child takes this drug.
- Long-term use may raise the chance of cataracts, glaucoma, or weak bones (osteoporosis). Talk with your child's doctor.
- You may need to lower how much salt is in your child's diet and give your child extra potassium. Talk with your child's doctor.
- If your child has high blood sugar (diabetes), you will need to watch your child's blood sugar closely.

- Alcohol may interact with this drug. Be sure your child does not drink alcohol.
- Talk with the doctor before your child gets any vaccines. Use of some vaccines with this drug may either raise the chance of very bad infection or make the vaccine not work as well.
- Chickenpox and measles can be very bad or even deadly in some people taking steroid drugs like this drug. Avoid having your child near anyone with chickenpox or measles if your child has not had these health problems before. If your child has been exposed to chickenpox or measles, talk with the doctor.
- Steroid drugs, including this one, raise the risk of infection. They can cause an active infection to get worse. They can also make some signs of infection harder to notice. Infections that happen with steroids can be mild, but they can also be severe and even deadly. The risk of problems from these infections is usually raised with higher doses of steroids. Have your child wash hands often and stay away from people with infections, colds, or flu. Tell the doctor if your child has any signs of an infection.
- Some infections may become active again in patients taking drugs like this one. This includes tuberculosis and hepatitis B. Tell the doctor if your child has ever had one of these infections.
- This drug lowers how much natural steroid your child's body makes. Tell your child's doctor if your child has fever, infection, surgery, or injury. The body's normal response to these stresses may be affected. Your child may need extra doses of steroid.
- If your child has been taking this drug for many weeks, talk with your child's doctor before stopping. You may want to slowly stop this drug.
- Tell the doctor if your child has missed a dose or recently stopped this drug and feels very tired, weak, or shaky, or has a fast heartbeat, confusion, sweating, or dizziness.
- In some people who have pheochromocytoma, it has gotten worse after taking this type of drug. Sometimes, this may be deadly. If your child has pheochromocytoma, talk with the doctor.

- A type of cancer (Kaposi's sarcoma) has happened in people taking drugs like this one for a long time. Talk with the doctor.
- Patients with cancer may be at greater risk of getting a bad and sometimes deadly health problem called tumor lysis syndrome (TLS). Talk with the doctor.
- This drug may affect growth in children and teens in some cases. They may need regular growth checks. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug may lower sperm counts. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.

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 used this drug while pregnant, tell the baby's doctor.

Injection:

- If your child is allergic to sulfites, talk with your child's doctor. Some products have sulfites in them.
- Very bad health problems have happened when drugs like this one have been given into the spine (epidural). These include paralysis, loss of eyesight, stroke, and sometimes death. It is not known if drugs like this one are safe and effective when given into the spine. These drugs are not approved for this use. Talk with the doctor.

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:

All products:

- 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 infection like fever, chills, very bad sore throat, ear or sinus pain, cough, more sputum or change in color of sputum, pain with passing urine, mouth sores, or wound that will not heal.
- 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 low potassium levels like muscle pain or weakness, muscle cramps, or a heartbeat that does not feel normal.
- 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 high blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Signs of a weak adrenal gland like a severe upset stomach or throwing up, severe dizziness or passing out, muscle weakness, feeling very tired, mood changes, decreased appetite, or weight loss.
- Signs of Cushing's syndrome like weight gain in the upper back or belly, moon face, severe headache, or slow healing.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Skin changes (pimples, stretch marks, slow healing, hair growth).
- Purple, red, blue, brown, or black bumps or patches on the skin or in the mouth.
- Fast, slow, or abnormal heartbeat.
- Chest pain or pressure.
- Swelling, warmth, numbness, change of color, or pain in a leg or arm.

- Bone or joint pain.
- Muscle pain or weakness.
- Change in eyesight.
- Change in the way your child acts.
- Depression or other mood changes.
- Seizures.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Severe stomach pain.
- Black, tarry, or bloody stools.
- Throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.

If your child has menstrual periods:

- Period (menstrual) changes.

Injection:

- Irritation where the shot is given.

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:

- Upset stomach or throwing up.
- Restlessness.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Sweating a lot.
- Hair thinning.

- Headache.
- Weight gain.
- Increased appetite.
- Feeling dizzy, tired, or weak.
- Hiccups.

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 in the morning if giving once a day.
- Give this drug with food to help prevent an upset stomach.
- 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.
- If your child takes cholestyramine, you may need to give it at some other time than this drug. Talk with the pharmacist.

All liquid products:

- Make sure you have the right liquid; there is more than one strength.
- 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.

Liquid (concentrate):

- Only use the measuring device that comes with this drug.
- Mix the liquid with water, juice, soda, applesauce, or pudding before giving it.
- After mixing, give your child's dose right away. Do not store for future use.

Injection:

- It is given as a shot.

What do I do if my child misses a dose?

All oral products:

- 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.

Injection:

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

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

All oral products:

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

All liquid products:

- Do not freeze.

Liquid (concentrate):

- Throw away any part not used 90 days after opening.

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

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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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