PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Emtricitabine and Tenofovir Alafenamide

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

Descovy

Brand Names: Canada

Descovy

Warning
For all patients taking this drug:

- Hepatitis B has gotten worse when this drug was stopped in some people with hepatitis B. Close follow-up for several months is needed when therapy is stopped in people who have hepatitis B. Do not stop giving this drug to your child without calling your child's doctor.
- This drug is not approved to treat hepatitis B. Hepatitis B testing needs to be done before your child takes this drug.

For HIV negative patients taking this drug to lower the chance of getting HIV through sex:

- Your child must have a negative HIV test before taking this drug and at least every 3 months while taking it. Tell the doctor if you think your child has been exposed to HIV. Call the doctor right away if your child has a fever, headache, feels tired, joint or muscle aches, throwing up, diarrhea, sore throat, rash, night sweats, or swollen glands. Call the doctor right away if your child has had any of these signs within 1 month before starting this drug.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used along with other drugs to treat HIV infection.

If your child is or may be sexually active:

- It is used in HIV negative patients to lower the chance of getting HIV infection through sex.

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

For all patients taking 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 kidney disease.
- If your child is taking another drug that has the same drug in it.
- If your child takes any drugs (prescription or OTC, natural products, vitamins) that must not be taken with this drug, like certain drugs that are used for HIV, infections, seizures, and others. There are many drugs that must not be taken with this drug.
- If your child is taking any drugs that can raise the chance of kidney problems. There are many drugs that can do this. Ask the doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- If your child is pregnant, may become pregnant, or is

breast-feeding a baby. Before giving this drug to your child, you will need to talk about the benefits and risks to your child and the baby. You will also need to talk about the best way for your child to prevent passing HIV to the baby.

For HIV negative patients taking this drug to lower the chance of getting HIV through sex:

- If your child has not been tested for HIV.

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?

For all patients taking 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.

- Have your child's blood work and other lab tests checked as you have been told by the doctor.
- Kidney problems like kidney failure have happened with this drug. Tell your child's doctor if your child has ever had kidney problems.
- Rarely, this drug may cause a swollen liver and a buildup of acid in the blood. Sometimes, this may be deadly. The risk may be higher in females, in overweight people, and in people who have taken drugs like this one for a long time.

For patients taking this drug to treat HIV infection:

- This drug is not a cure for HIV. Keep giving this drug to your child as you have been told by the doctor or other health care provider, even if your child feels well. Be sure your child stays under the care of the doctor and has regular appointments.
- This drug helps to lower how much HIV is in the blood. Lowering the amount of HIV in the blood until it is not detected on blood tests can help lower the risk of spreading HIV to others. There are also other ways to help prevent the spread of HIV to others. This includes using condoms during sex and not sharing needles and other injection equipment. Talk with your child's doctor

or other health care provider about the best way to prevent spreading HIV to others.

For HIV negative patients taking this drug to lower the chance of getting HIV through sex:

- This drug does not always prevent HIV. It needs to be used as part of a program that has other measures to help prevent HIV. This includes safer sex habits like using condoms, testing for diseases passed by having sex, and talking with sex partners who have HIV about their HIV treatment. Talk with the doctor for more information.

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.

- 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 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 too much lactic acid in the blood (lactic acidosis) like fast breathing, fast heartbeat, a heartbeat that does not feel normal, very bad upset stomach or throwing up, feeling very sleepy, shortness of breath, feeling very tired or weak, very bad dizziness, feeling cold, or muscle pain or cramps.

For patients taking this drug to treat HIV infection:

- Changes in your child's immune system can happen when your child starts taking drugs to treat HIV. If your child has an infection that you did not know was there, it may show up when your child takes this drug. Tell your child's doctor right away if your child has any new signs after starting this drug, even after taking it for several months. This includes signs of infection like fever, sore throat, weakness, cough, or shortness of breath.

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:

For patients taking this drug to treat HIV infection:

- Upset stomach.

For HIV negative patients taking this drug to lower the chance of getting HIV through sex:

- Diarrhea.

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.

- Give this drug with or without food.
- It is important that your child does not miss or skip a

dose of this drug during treatment.

- If your child is on dialysis and is taking this drug on the day of dialysis, give it to your child after dialysis. If you have questions, talk with your child's doctor.

What do I do if my child misses a dose?

- 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.
- If you are not sure what to do if your child misses a dose, call the doctor.

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

Bottle:

- Store tablets in the original container at room temperature. Keep the cap tightly closed.

Blister pack:

- Store at room temperature.

All products:

- Store in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- 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 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

2026-07-14

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.

Emtricitabine and Tenofovir Alafenamide - Last updated on December 12, 2022
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center