PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Hydroxychloroquine

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

Plaquenil; Sovuna

Brand Names: Canada

APO-Hydroxyquine; JAMP Hydroxychloroquine Sulf; MINT-Hydroxychloroquine; NRA-Hydroxychloroquine; Plaquenil

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat or prevent malaria.
- It is used to treat lupus.
- It is used to treat rheumatoid arthritis.
- It may be given to your child for other reasons. 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 ever had a long QT on ECG or other heartbeat that is not normal.
- If your child has any of these health problems: Low potassium levels, low

magnesium levels, or slow heartbeat.

- If your child has any of these health problems: Eye problems like retinopathy, heart failure (weak heart), or if your child has had a recent heart attack.
- If your child has had any eye or eyesight changes from this drug or drugs like this one.
- If your child has any of these health problems: Porphyria or psoriasis.
- If your child is taking any of these drugs: Cimetidine or rifampicin.
- 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.

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

For all uses of 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 checked, eye exams, and an ECG (to see how your child's heart beats) as you have been told by the doctor.
- Be careful if your child has low levels of an enzyme called G6PD. Anemia may happen. Low levels of G6PD may be more likely in patients of African, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean descent.
- This drug may make your child sunburn more easily. Use care if your child will be in the sun. Tell your child's doctor if your child sunburns easily while

taking this drug.

- Low blood sugar has happened with this drug. Sometimes, this has been very bad and could be life-threatening. Talk with the doctor.
- Check your child's blood sugar as you have been told by the doctor.
- Alcohol may interact with this drug. Be sure your child does not drink alcohol.
- Keep away from children. Accidental exposure may cause death. If a child takes this drug by accident, get medical help right away.

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.

Preventing malaria:

- Other measures are needed along with this drug including using screens, bed netting, insect repellent (10% to 35% DEET), and permethrin spray on clothing and nets. Avoid spraying most insect repellents on children. Lower evening and night-time outdoor activity.
- If your child has a fever while in or after leaving a malaria area, call the doctor right away.
- If your child is pregnant and is traveling to a malaria-infested place, talk to the doctor about the risks first.

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:

- 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 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 low blood sugar like dizziness, headache, feeling sleepy, feeling weak, shaking, a fast heartbeat, confusion, hunger, or sweating.
- Seizures.
- New or worse behavior or mood changes like depression or thoughts of suicide.
- Feeling confused.
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there).
- Bad dreams.
- Ringing in the ears, hearing loss, or any other changes in hearing.
- Change in balance.
- Trouble controlling body movements.
- Shakiness.
- Muscle weakness.
- Not able to control eye movements.
- A severe eye problem has happened with this drug. This may lead to lasting eyesight problems. The risk may be higher if your child has some types of eye or kidney problems. The risk may also be higher with some doses of this drug, if your child uses this drug for longer than 5 years, or if your child takes certain other drugs like tamoxifen. Call the doctor right away if your child has eyesight changes like blurred or foggy eyesight, trouble focusing or reading, or trouble seeing in dim light. Call the doctor right away if your child has any eyesight loss, sees dark spots, or sees only part of an object.

- 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. Call your child's doctor right away if your child has signs of infection like fever, chills, or sore throat; any unexplained bruising or bleeding; or if your child feels very tired or weak.
- Heart problems like heart failure and a certain abnormal heartbeat (prolonged QT interval) have happened with this drug. Sometimes, these heart problems have been deadly. Call your child's doctor right away if your child has a fast or abnormal heartbeat; very bad dizziness or passing out; or shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- 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.

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:

- Feeling dizzy, tired, or weak.
- Headache.
- Feeling nervous and excitable.
- Diarrhea, stomach pain, upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.
- Weight loss.
- Change in color of skin.
- Change in color of hair.
- Hair loss.

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.

For all uses of this drug:

- Give this drug with food or milk.
- Have your child swallow whole. Do not let your child chew, break, or crush.
- Some products may be broken in half. If you are not sure if you can break this product in half, talk with the doctor.
- 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.
- Do not give antacids or kaolin within 4 hours of this drug.

Preventing malaria:

- Be sure you know when your child needs to start taking this drug. If you are not sure when, 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.

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

- Store at room temperature 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 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

2026-05-12

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.

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

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center