PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Lamivudine

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

Epivir; Epivir HBV [DSC]

Brand Names: Canada

3TC; APO-LamiVUDine; APO-LamiVUDine HBV; JAMP Lamivudine; JAMP Lamivudine HBV

Warning

All products:

- 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.
- There is more than 1 brand of this drug. One brand cannot safely be used for the other. Your child's doctor will tell you about any needed change.

Epivir-HBV:

- Do not give your child this brand of this drug if your child has HIV infection. The dose of this brand is not enough and HIV may be harder to treat after taking it. HIV testing needs to be done before taking this brand. Talk with your child's doctor.

What is this drug used for?

Epivir:

- It is used to treat HIV infection.

Epivir-HBV:

- It is used to treat hepatitis B infection.

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 is taking another drug that has the same drug in it.
- If your child is taking emtricitabine.
- If your child is taking a drug that has sorbitol in it.

Treating HIV infection:

- 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.

Hepatitis B infection:

- If your child is pregnant or may become pregnant. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks to your child and the baby. To prevent passing hepatitis B to your child's baby, the baby may need to receive other treatment (hepatitis B immune globulin and hepatitis B vaccine) after birth.
- If your child is breast-feeding a baby. You will need to talk about the benefits and risks to your child and the baby. Talk with the doctor if your child's baby did not receive hepatitis B immune globulin or hepatitis B vaccine after birth.

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 and other lab tests checked as you have been told by the doctor.
- If your child has high blood sugar (diabetes), talk with the doctor. Some of these products have sugar.
- 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.
- A pancreas problem (pancreatitis) has happened in children taking lamivudine with or without other HIV drugs. Sometimes this has been deadly. If you have questions, talk with the doctor.
- If the patient is a child, use this drug with care. The risk of some side effects may be higher in children.
- If your child's weight changes, talk with the doctor. The dose of this drug may need to be changed.

Treating HIV infection:

- If your child has HIV and hepatitis B, the hepatitis B virus can change while your child takes this drug. If this happens, the hepatitis B virus may be harder to treat. Talk with the doctor.
- 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.

- When able to, it is best for your child to take the tablet form of this drug. The liquid form of this drug did not work as well in children taking other liquid HIV drugs as it did in children taking the tablet form. Talk with your child's doctor.

Hepatitis B infection:

- Tell your child's doctor if your child has never been on hepatitis care before.
- This drug is not a cure for hepatitis infection. 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 does not stop the spread of hepatitis to others through blood, body fluids, or having sex. Be sure your child does not have any kind of sex without using a condom. Be sure needles and other injection equipment are not shared. Be sure personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them like toothbrushes or razors are not shared. Talk with your child's doctor or other health care provider about safe sex and other ways to have your child prevent spreading hepatitis to others.

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 uses of 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 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.
- Signs of a pancreas problem (pancreatitis) like very bad stomach pain, very bad back pain, or very bad upset stomach or throwing up.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Depression.

Treating 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:

- Headache.
- Diarrhea, upset stomach, or throwing up.
- Decreased appetite.
- Stomach cramps.

- Feeling dizzy, tired, or weak.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Muscle pain.
- Nose or throat irritation.
- Ear irritation.

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 products:

- 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.

All liquid products:

- 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.

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?

- Store at room temperature in a dry place. Do not store in a bathroom.
- Keep lid tightly closed.
- 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

2024-12-02

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.

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

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center