



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Peginterferon Alfa-2a

This information from Lexicomp® 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

Pegasys; Pegasys ProClick

Brand Names: Canada

Pegasys

Warning

- Alpha interferons may cause mental health problems or make them worse. Suicide or suicidal thoughts, thoughts of hurting others, depression, forceful actions, hallucinations, and other mood or behavior problems have happened during treatment and within 6 months after the last dose. Relapse of drug addiction has also happened. Alpha interferons may also cause or make infections, blood flow problems, or autoimmune diseases worse. Sometimes, these may be deadly. If you think your child has any of these health problems, call your child's doctor right away. Side effects such as high or low blood pressure, a fast or abnormal heartbeat, chest pain or pressure, trouble breathing, heart attacks, and strokes have happened. Closely read the part in this leaflet which lists when to call your child's doctor. Many times, but not every time, these side effects get better after stopping this drug.

What is this drug used for?

- It is used to treat hepatitis C infection.
- 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 has an allergy to this drug or any part of this drug.
- If your child is allergic to any drugs like this one or any other drugs, foods, or other substances. Tell the doctor about the allergy and what signs your child had, like rash; hives; itching; shortness of breath; wheezing; cough; swelling of face, lips, tongue, or throat; or any other signs.
- If your child has any of these health problems: Autoimmune hepatitis or liver disease.
- If your child has had a transplant.

If your child is breast-feeding a baby:

- Talk with the doctor if your child is breast-feeding a baby or plans to breast-feed a baby.

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 for your child to take this drug with all of his/her 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?

- 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 often. Talk with your child's doctor.
- This drug may affect growth in children and teens in some cases. They may need regular growth checks. Talk with the doctor.
- Have your child avoid tasks or actions that call for alertness until you see how this drug affects your child. These are things like riding a bike, playing sports, or using items such as scissors, lawnmowers, electric scooters, toy

cars, or motorized vehicles.

- Tell your child's doctor if your child has signs of high or low blood sugar like breath that smells like fruit, dizziness, fast breathing, fast heartbeat, feeling confused, feeling sleepy, feeling weak, flushing, headache, more thirsty or hungry, passing urine more often, shaking, or sweating.
- Have your child's blood sugar checked as you have been told by your child's doctor.
- Alcohol may interact with this drug. Be sure your child does not drink alcohol.
- This drug may cause eye problems that may lead to loss of eyesight or blindness. Tell your child's doctor if your child has or has ever had eye problems. Call your child's doctor right away if your child has any changes in eyesight.
- It is not known if this drug will prevent liver failure or other liver problems like cancer. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug may be used with other drugs to treat your child's health condition. If your child is also taking other drugs, talk with your child's doctor about the risks and side effects that may happen.
- Have your child drink lots of noncaffeine liquids unless told to drink less liquid by your child's doctor.
- Some products have benzyl alcohol. Do not give a product that has benzyl alcohol in it to a newborn or infant. Talk with the doctor to see if this product has benzyl alcohol in it.
- This drug caused fertility problems in animals. It is not known if it will cause fertility problems in humans. Talk with the doctor.
- This drug does not stop the spread of diseases like HIV or hepatitis that are passed through blood. Be sure needles and other things like toothbrushes or razors are not shared.
- If your child is of childbearing age, a pregnancy test will need to be done before starting this drug to make sure she is not pregnant.

If your child is or may be sexually active:

- This drug does not stop the spread of diseases like HIV or hepatitis that are passed through having sex. Be sure your child does not have any kind of sex without using a latex or polyurethane condom.
- This drug may cause harm to an unborn baby. Females must use birth control while taking this drug. If your child gets pregnant, call your child's doctor right away.

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 high blood pressure like very bad headache or dizziness, passing out, or change in eyesight.
- Signs of thyroid problems like change in weight; feeling nervous, excitable, restless, or weak; hair thinning; depression; neck swelling; not able to focus; trouble with heat or cold; menstrual changes; shakiness; or sweating.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in balance, drooping on one side of the face, or blurred eyesight.
- Change in eyesight.
- Loss of eyesight.
- Memory problems or loss.
- Not able to focus.
- Feeling irritable.
- Some people have had lung problems with this drug. Sometimes, this has been deadly. Call your child's doctor right away if your child has signs of lung

problems like shortness of breath or other trouble breathing, cough that is new or worse, or fever.

- Very bad and sometimes deadly liver problems have happened with this drug. Call your child's doctor right away if your child has signs of liver problems like dark urine, feeling tired, not hungry, upset stomach or stomach pain, light-colored stools, throwing up, or yellow skin or eyes.
- Severe bowel problems (colitis) have happened within 12 weeks of treatment with alpha interferons like this drug. Sometimes, this could be deadly. Call the doctor right away if your child has severe stomach pain, bloody diarrhea, throwing up blood, or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.
- Severe and sometimes deadly pancreas problems (pancreatitis) have happened with this drug. This could happen at any time during treatment. Call the doctor right away if your child has signs of pancreatitis like very bad stomach pain, very bad back pain, or very upset stomach or throwing up.
- A very bad skin reaction (Stevens-Johnson syndrome/toxic epidermal necrolysis) may happen. It can cause very bad health problems that may not go away, and sometimes death. Get medical help right away if your child has signs like red, swollen, blistered, or peeling skin (with or without fever); red or irritated eyes; or sores in the mouth, throat, nose, or eyes.
- 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.

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:

- Flu-like signs.
- Upset stomach or throwing up.
- Diarrhea.
- Belly pain.

- Not hungry.
- Dry mouth.
- Muscle or joint pain.
- Back pain.
- Headache.
- Dizziness.
- Hair loss.
- Not able to sleep.
- Feeling tired or weak.
- Sweating a lot.
- Irritation where the shot is 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.

- It is given as a shot into the fatty part of the skin on the top of the thigh or the belly area.
- The shot is most often given once a week.
- If you will be giving your child the shot, your child's doctor or nurse will teach you how to give the shot.
- Wash your hands before and after use.
- Before giving the shot, let it come to room temperature. Do not heat this drug.
- Do not shake.
- Do not use if the solution is cloudy, leaking, or has particles.

- Do not use if solution changes color.
- Move the site where you give the shot with each shot.
- Throw syringe away after use. Do not use the same syringe more than one time.
- Throw away needles in a needle/sharp disposal box. Do not reuse needles or other items. When the box is full, follow all local rules for getting rid of it. Talk with a doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions.

What do I do if my child misses a dose?

- Give a missed dose as soon as you think about it and go back to your child's normal time.
- Do not give 2 doses at the same time or extra doses.
- If your child misses the dose by more than 2 days, call the doctor to find out what to do.

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

- Store in a refrigerator. Do not freeze.
- Throw away unopened drug if left at room temperature for more than 24 hours.
- Protect from light.
- Throw away any part left over after the dose is given.
- 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.
- Keep a list of all your child's drugs (prescription, natural products, vitamins, OTC) with you. Give this list to your child's doctor.
- Talk with your child's doctor before giving your child any new drug, including prescription or OTC, natural products, or vitamins.
- 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 information should not be used to decide whether or not to take this medicine or any other medicine. Only the healthcare provider has the knowledge and training to decide which medicines are right for a specific patient. This information does not endorse any medicine as safe, effective, or approved for treating any patient or health condition. This is only a brief summary of general information about this medicine. It does NOT include all information about the possible uses, directions, warnings, precautions, interactions, adverse effects, or risks that may apply to this medicine. This information is not specific medical advice and does not replace information you receive from the healthcare provider. You must talk with the healthcare provider for complete information about the risks and benefits of using this medicine.

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If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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