

## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Interferon Alfa-2b

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

Intron A [DSC]

## Brand Names: Canada

Intron A (Hsa-Free) [DSC]; Intron A [DSC]

## 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 B and C infections.
- If your child has been given this drug for some other reason, talk with the doctor about the benefits and risks. Talk with the doctor if you have questions or concerns about giving this drug to your child.

## **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 any of these health problems: Autoimmune disease or liver problems.
- If your child has any of these health problems: Diabetes or thyroid problems.
- If your child has had an organ transplant.

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 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.
- High triglyceride levels have happened with this drug. Tell your child's doctor if your child has ever had high triglyceride levels.
- Have your child's blood work checked and eye exams as you have been told by your child's doctor.
- High blood sugar has happened with this drug. This includes diabetes that is new or worse.
- Check your child's blood sugar as you have been told by the doctor.
- Your child may have more chance of getting infections. Have your child wash hands often. Avoid crowds and people with infections, colds, or flu.
- Your child may bleed more easily. Make sure your child is careful and avoids injury. Be sure your child has a soft toothbrush.
- Take care of your child's teeth. See a dentist often.
- If your child throws up, have your child rinse the mouth out well.
- This drug may affect growth in children and teens in some cases. They may need regular growth checks. Talk with the doctor.
- It is not known if this drug will prevent liver failure or other liver problems like cancer. 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.
- This drug may be used with ribavirin. If your child is also taking ribavirin, talk with the doctor about the risks and side effects that may happen.

## **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.
- Have your child use birth control to prevent pregnancy while taking this drug.

## **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.

## **Powder:**

- This drug is made from human plasma (part of the blood) and may have viruses that may cause disease. This drug is screened, tested, and treated to lower the chance that it carries an infection. 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:

- 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 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 sugar like confusion, feeling sleepy, unusual thirst or hunger, passing urine more often, flushing, fast breathing, or breath that smells like fruit.
- Signs of thyroid problems like change in weight; feeling nervous, excitable, restless, or weak; hair thinning; depression; eye or neck swelling; not able to focus; trouble with heat or cold; menstrual changes; shakiness; or sweating.
- New or worse behavior or mood changes like depression or thoughts of suicide.
- Any unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Black, tarry, or bloody stools.
- Throwing up blood or throw up that looks like coffee grounds.
- Chest pain or pressure, a fast heartbeat, or an abnormal heartbeat.
- Weakness on 1 side of the body, trouble speaking or thinking, change in balance, drooping on one side of the face, or blurred eyesight.
- Shortness of breath, a big weight gain, or swelling in the arms or legs.
- Severe stomach pain.
- A burning, numbness, or tingling feeling that is not normal.
- Memory problems or loss.
- Feeling confused.
- Trouble walking.
- Not able to pass urine or change in how much urine is passed.
- Change in look of teeth or gums.
- 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.
- Liver problems have happened with this drug. Rarely, this has been

deadly. Call the doctor right away if your child has 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.

- 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.

## **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, sleepy, tired, or weak.
- Change in taste.
- Weight loss.
- Dry mouth.
- Constipation, diarrhea, upset stomach, throwing up, or decreased appetite.
- Irritation where the shot is given.
- Hair thinning.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Flu-like signs. These include headache, weakness, fever, shakes, aches, pains, and sweating. Mild pain drugs may help.

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:

- It is given as a shot.
- If you will be giving your child the shot, your child's doctor or nurse will teach you how to give the shot.
- 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.
- Before giving the shot, let it come to room temperature. Do not heat this drug.
- Move the site where you give the shot with each shot.
- Do not give into skin that is irritated, bruised, red, infected, hard, or scarred.
- Do not use if the solution is cloudy, leaking, or has particles.
- Do not use if solution changes color.
- Wash your hands before and after use.
- 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.
- Have your child drink lots of noncaffeine liquids every day unless told to drink less liquid by your child's doctor.

### Powder:

- This drug must be mixed with sterile water before using. The sterile water that comes with this drug is meant for one use only. Throw away any part of the sterile water that is not used after one use.

## **Prefilled syringes or pen:**

- Do not share pen or cartridge devices with another person even if the needle has been changed. Sharing these devices may pass infections from one person to another. This includes infections you may not know your child has.

## **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 miss giving this drug to your child for a few days in a row, call the doctor before you start giving it again.

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

### **All products:**

- Store in a refrigerator. Do not freeze.
- 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.

### **Powder:**

- After mixing, be sure you know how long the product is good for and how to store it. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.
- Throw away any part of opened vial not used after use.



## **Solution:**

- After opening, be sure you know how long the product is good for and how to store it. Ask the doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure.

## **Prefilled syringes or pen:**

- Put back in the refrigerator right after each use.
- Throw away any part not used after 28 days.

## **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

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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](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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