



# Zidovudine for treatment of HIV infection

This leaflet is about the use of zidovudine for treatment of HIV infection (human immunodeficiency virus).

This leaflet has been written for parents and carers about how to use this medicine in children. Our information sometimes differs from that provided by the manufacturers, because their information is usually aimed at adult patients. Please read this leaflet carefully. Keep it somewhere safe so that you can read it again.

It is very important that your child keeps taking zidovudine and any other treatments recommended by your doctor regularly, to avoid the HIV virus becoming resistant to treatment. This medicine needs to be taken every day.

## Name of drug

**Zidovudine (or azidothymidine, AZT)**

**Brand name:** Retrovir®

Some combination treatments also contain zidovudine (for example abacavir and combivir) but these are not covered by this leaflet.

## Why is it important to take this medicine?

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a serious viral infection for children and adults. Zidovudine slows down the growth and spread of the HIV virus, to help slow the progression of the illness. Zidovudine is often used together with other medicines that work against HIV.

## What is zidovudine available as?

- **Capsules:** 100 mg, 250 mg
- **Liquid medicine:** 50 mg in 5 mL (sugar-free)


If you have any concerns or questions, speak with your child's doctor or pharmacist.

## When should I give zidovudine?

- Zidovudine is usually given **twice** each day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Ideally, these times are 12 hours apart, for example some time between 7 and 8 am, and between 7 and 8 pm. You can give zidovudine before, with or after food.
- It is important that the amount of zidovudine in your child's blood remains steady, so try to spread the doses apart as evenly as you can.
- Give the medicine at about the same times each day so that this becomes part of your child's daily routine, which will help you to remember.

## How much should I give?

Your doctor will work out the amount of zidovudine (the dose) that is right for *your* child. The dose will be shown on the medicine label.

 **It is important that you follow your doctor's instructions about how much to give.**

## How should I give it?



**Capsules** should be swallowed with a glass of water, milk or juice. Your child should not chew the capsule.



**Liquid medicine:** Measure out the right amount using an oral syringe or medicine spoon. You can get these from your pharmacist. Do not use a kitchen teaspoon as it will not give the right amount.

 **It is important to give the whole dose each time.**

## When should the medicine start working?

The medicine starts working straight away, but you may not see much difference in your child. Continue to give the medicine to your child during this time. If you are worried about whether it is helping, contact your doctor.

## What if my child is sick (vomits)?

- If your child is sick less than 30 minutes after having a dose of zidovudine, give them the same dose again.
- If your child is sick more than 30 minutes after having a dose of zidovudine you **do not** need to give them another dose. Wait until the next normal dose.

If your child is sick again, seek advice from your GP, pharmacist or hospital. They will decide what to do based on your child's condition and the specific medicine involved.

## What if I forget to give it?

Zidovudine should be given twice each day. If you remember up to 6 hours after you should have given a dose, give your child the missed dose. For example, if you usually give a dose at about 7 am, you can give the missed dose at any time up to 1 pm. If you remember after that time, do not give the missed dose. Just give the next dose as usual.

 **Do not give a double dose of zidovudine.**


## What if I give too much?


You are unlikely to do harm if you give an extra dose of zidovudine by mistake. If you are concerned that you may have given too much, contact your doctor or local NHS services (111 England and Scotland; 0845 4647 in Wales). Have the medicine or packaging with you if you call for advice.


## Are there any possible side-effects?


We use medicines to make our children better, but sometimes they have other effects that we don't want (side-effects). In general, children have fewer side-effects than adults from taking zidovudine.

## Side-effects you must do something about

 Very rarely, zidovudine can cause seizures (convulsions or fits). If your child has a seizure, call an ambulance. Do not restrain your child, but try to make sure that they cannot hurt themselves (e.g. put a cushion under their head and move them away from furniture).

 If your child gets pains or weakness in their arms or legs, has trouble breathing or has stomach pain with nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick), take them to your doctor or hospital straight away, as there may be a problem with your child's blood (build-up of lactic acid).

 If your child starts being sick every few hours, has stomach pains, is very sleepy or has jaundice (their skin or eyes look yellow), take them to your doctor or hospital **straight away**, as there may be a problem with your child's liver.

 If your child gets unusual bleeding or bruising, a sore throat, or flu-like symptoms, contact your doctor, as there may be a problem with your child's blood.

#### Other side-effects you need to know about

- Your child may have disturbances of taste (they may say food tastes funny), feel less hungry (lose their appetite), feel sick (nausea) or be sick (vomit) or have some diarrhoea. It may help to give zidovudine with some food or shortly afterwards.
- Your child may be slightly breathless or have mild chest pain, feel dizzy, tired or light-headed, have changes in mood, or have difficulty sleeping. They may also seem less alert than usual and may say that they cannot think clearly.
- Your child may sweat more than usual or need to go to the toilet (wee) more often than usual.
- Your child may notice a slight discolouration of their nails or skin, they may also get 'pins and needles' or say that their skin is itchy.

These side-effects are usually mild in children taking zidovudine, but if you are worried about any of them, contact your doctor.

There may, sometimes, be other side-effects that are not listed above. If you notice anything unusual and are concerned, contact your doctor. You can report any suspected side-effects to a UK safety scheme at [www.yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk).


More information on side-effects can be found in the following leaflet [www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/side-effects-childrens-medicines](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/side-effects-childrens-medicines)

#### Can other medicines be given at the same time as zidovudine?

- You can give your child medicines that contain paracetamol, unless your doctor has told you not to. However, you **should not** give your child medicines containing **ibuprofen**.
- Zidovudine should not be taken with some medicines that you get on prescription. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about any other medicines your child is taking, before giving zidovudine.
- Check with your doctor or pharmacist **before** giving any other medicines to your child. This includes herbal or complementary medicines.

#### Is there anything else I need to know about this medicine?

- Your child will need regular blood tests to check how well zidovudine is working, and also whether it is affecting their blood, kidneys or liver. They will need these tests after the first month of treatment, and then every three months.

 It is very important that you keep your appointments for these blood tests.

- If your daughter is planning to become pregnant or thinks that she may be pregnant, it is important that she sees a doctor as soon as possible. She should keep taking her medicine until she sees a doctor.

#### General advice about medicines

- If you feel your child is not improving, do not give extra medicine. Please continue with the regular dose and speak to your doctor.
- Only give this medicine to your child. Never give it to anyone else, even if their condition appears to be the same, as this could do harm.
- If you think someone else may have taken the medicine by accident, contact a doctor.
- Make sure that you always have enough medicine. Order a new prescription at least 2 weeks before you will run out.
- Make sure that the medicine you have at home has not reached the 'best before' or 'use by' date on the packaging. Give old medicines to your pharmacist to dispose of.

#### Where I should keep this medicine?

- Keep the medicine in a cupboard, away from heat and direct sunlight. It does not need to be kept in the fridge.
- Make sure that children cannot see or reach the medicine.
- Keep the medicine in the container it came in.

#### Who to contact for more information

Your child's doctor, pharmacist or nurse will be able to give you more information about zidovudine and about other medicines used to treat HIV.

You can also get useful information from:

**England: NHS 111** - Tel 111 - [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**Scotland: NHS 24** - Tel 111 - [www.nhs24.scot](http://www.nhs24.scot)

**Wales: NHS 111 Wales** - Tel 111 - [www.111.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.111.wales.nhs.uk)

**Northern Ireland: NI Direct** - [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

#### Children's HIV Association

[www.chiva.org.uk](http://www.chiva.org.uk)

[www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk)



Version 1, August 2016. © NPPG, RCPCH and WellChild 2011, all rights reserved. Reviewed by: August 2019.

The primary source for the information in this leaflet is the British National Formulary for Children. For details on any other sources used for this leaflet, please contact us through our website, [www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk](http://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk)

We take great care to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct and up-to-date. However, medicines can be used in different ways for different patients. It is important that you ask the advice of your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure about something. This leaflet is about the use of these medicines in the UK, and may not apply to other countries. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), the Neonatal and Paediatric Pharmacists Group (NPPG), WellChild and the contributors and editors cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of information, omissions of information, or any actions that may be taken as a consequence of reading this leaflet.