

## PEG-INTERFERON alfa-2b and Ribavirin

**Other NAMES:** Pegatron™

### WHY were these drugs prescribed?

Peg-interferon alfa-2b and ribavirin are given in combination for the treatment of chronic hepatitis C in people who presently have a stable liver function. Hepatitis C is an infection of the liver by the hepatitis C virus. This treatment allows a decrease in the amount of hepatitis C virus and a decrease in liver inflammation and damage.

### HOW should these drugs be taken?

**Ribavirin** is available as a 200 mg capsule. The usual dose of ribavirin is 800 mg daily. This dose may need to be adjusted based on your weight or if you develop adverse effects. Ribavirin may be taken with or without food.

Your dosage of ribavirin is:

200 mg capsule

\_\_\_ capsules(\_\_\_\_mg) in the morning and

\_\_\_ capsules(\_\_\_\_mg) in the evening

Five different strengths of Peg-interferon alfa-2b are available with Pegatron™. The dose of peg-interferon alfa-2b also depends on your weight and on the presence of adverse effects. The usual recommended dose of peg-interferon alfa-2b can vary between 50 to 150 micrograms once a week. Peg-interferon alfa-2b is injected underneath the skin (subcutaneous).

Your dosage of peg-interferon alfa-2b is:

\_\_\_mL (\_\_\_mcg) subcutaneous injection  
once a week

### Preparation of the peg-interferon alfa-2b dose:

A nurse may give you each injection or a nurse can teach you how to do it on your own at home:

- You will be shown how to prepare the dose. Each vial should be used only once. Once you have prepared your injection, throw away the vial and whatever drug is left in this vial.
- You should use a new needle and syringe each time you prepare a dose. You will be given a rigid plastic container to put all the syringes and needles once they have been used. Do not throw them in the garbage.
- You will be shown the sites on the body where you can give yourself the injection. It is important that you use a different body area each time you give yourself an injection.

### What should you do if you FORGET a dose?

If you miss a dose of ribavirin or peg-interferon alfa-2b, take it as soon as possible. However, if it is time for your next dose, do not double the dose, just carry on with your regular schedule.

### What ADVERSE EFFECTS can these drugs cause? What should you do about them?

Ribavirin and peg-interferon alfa-2b may cause a number of undesired effects such as **abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and loss of appetite.** Please talk

to your doctor if these symptoms appear and are bothersome.

With the injections of peg-interferon alfa-2b, “flu-like” symptoms including **fever, chills, headache, and muscle pain** may appear. To prevent or treat these symptoms, you can take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) 500 to 1000 mg before the injection.

Ribavirin may cause **hemolytic anemia** (the breakdown of red blood cells). These drugs can also cause **leukopenia** (a decrease in the number of white blood cells so that you have a higher risk of bacterial infection) and **thrombocytopenia** (a decrease in the number of platelets that can increase your risk of bleeding or bruising). Blood tests will be done regularly to check for any changes in these values. **Inform your doctor if you notice any symptoms such as fever, bleeding, bruising, shortness of breath, fatigue, chest pain, and a rapid and irregular heartbeat.**

Rarely, some people can develop an **allergic reaction** to the drugs. Consult a doctor immediately if you develop a skin rash, itching, hives, swelling of the hands, face and tongue, or sudden difficulties breathing.

Peg-interferon alfa-2b can also cause **mood changes**. These might include anxiety, problems sleeping, dizziness, increased irritability and depression. Please talk to your doctor if these symptoms appear and are bothersome.

Other possible adverse effects include the loss of hair, dry skin, vision problems and an inflammation, irritation or bruising at the injection sites.

**It is important that you keep your doctor appointments and come for your**

**laboratory tests so that your progress can be followed.**

**What other PRECAUTIONS should you follow while using these drugs?**

Before using these drugs, it is especially important to notify your doctor if you have any type of blood disorder, unstable liver disease or liver disease other than hepatitis C, kidney disease, diabetes, heart disease, thyroid problems, high blood pressure, lung disease, arthritis, lupus, psoriasis, a history of mental illness or a history of drug or alcohol abuse.

Inform your doctor and pharmacist of all prescribed and non-prescribed drugs you are taking. As well, you should inform them of natural products you are taking. If you wish to start a new drug or natural product, please consult with your pharmacist before doing so.

**Please inform your doctor if you are pregnant.** You should NOT use Pegatron™ if you are pregnant as it can cause birth defects. Also, you should NOT breastfeed while receiving Pegatron™.

If you are a woman with childbearing potential, you should always use 2 effective contraceptive methods (birth control pill and condom) to avoid becoming pregnant while you are taking this drug. These contraceptive methods should be continued for 6 months following the end of the treatment. If you are a male partner of a woman who is of childbearing age, you should use a condom during treatment with Pegatron™ and for at least 6 months following the end of the treatment. In general, even if you are not taking Pegatron™, the use of condoms is always recommended to decrease the risk of passing HIV on to others.

**How should these drugs be STORED?**

Ribavirin capsules should be stored in a cool (2-30°C) dry place, protected from light and well out of the reach of children. Ensure that the drug has not expired by checking the expiry date ("EXP") shown on the outside of the package.

Peg-interferon alfa-2b vials of powder may be stored at room temperature (15-30°C). Once it is diluted with the appropriate liquid, the peg-interferon alfa-2b dose should be kept in the refrigerator (2-8°C) and used within 24 hours. Keep well out of the reach of children.

Do not store in your bathroom or near the stove, as heat and moisture may cause the drugs to be less active.

**If you have any questions or concerns about this drug or if you are experiencing adverse effects, please discuss them with your pharmacist, doctor or nurse.**

**Write questions or concerns down to ensure they are addressed.**

The following pharmacist is available to answer questions:

**Pharmacist:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

Reference: ribavirin plus peginterferon alfa-2b (Pegatron®) Product Monograph. Schering-Plough Ltd., Kirkland, QC, 2009. Prepared by the Ontario HIV Pharmacy Professional Specialty Group, 2003. Reviewed 2009.

Additional medication fact sheets and updates may be found at: [www.hivclinic.ca](http://www.hivclinic.ca)

***PEGETRON™***

***(Peg-Interferon alfa-2b***

***And***

***Ribavirin)***

***MEDICATION***

***FACT SHEET***