

# Dexamethasone

(dex-a-meth-a-zone)

**Category:** Glucocorticoid

**Other Names for this Medication:** Azium®, Decadron®, Dexium®, Dexameth-a-Vet®, Dex-a-Vet®

**Common Dosage Forms: Veterinary:** 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 0.75 mg, 1 mg, 1.5 mg, 2 mg, 4 mg, & 6 mg tablets; 0.5 mg/5mL (0.1 mg/mL) oral solution. **Human:** 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 0.75 mg, 1 mg, 1.5 mg, 2 mg, 4 mg, & 6 mg oral tablets.

This information sheet does not contain all available information for this medication. It is to help answer commonly asked questions and help you give the medication safely and effectively to your animal. If you have other questions or need more information about this medication, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist.

## Key Information

- ▶ Long-acting glucocorticoid that is best given with food, but may be given without. If your pet vomits or acts sick after receiving the drug on an empty stomach, try giving the next dose with food or a small treat. If vomiting continues, contact your veterinarian.
- ▶ There are many side effects, especially when the drug is used long term.
- ▶ In dogs, stomach or intestinal ulcers, perforation, or bleeding can occur. The risk for this occurring is increased if used with drugs like aspirin, NSAIDs (eg, carprofen) or other cortisone-like drugs (eg, prednisone). If your dog stops eating, or develops a low energy level, black tarry stools, or bloody vomit, contact your veterinarian immediately.

## How is this medication useful?

Dexamethasone is a glucocorticoid steroid that, when administered by mouth, may be used in animals as an anti-inflammatory or immunosuppressive agent.

The FDA (U.S. Food & Drug Administration) has approved some dexamethasone products for use in dogs, cats, horses, and cattle. The FDA does allow veterinarians to prescribe and use products containing this drug in different species or for other conditions in certain situations. The FDA (U.S. Food & Drug Administration) has also approved other dexamethasone products for use in humans, but allows veterinarians to prescribe and use these products in animals in certain situations. You and your veterinarian can discuss why this drug is the most appropriate choice.

## What should I tell my veterinarian to see if this medication can be safely given?

Many things might affect how well this drug will work in your animal. Be sure to discuss the following with your veterinarian so together you can make the best treatment decisions.

- ▶ Other drugs can interact with dexamethasone, so be sure to tell your veterinarian and pharmacist what medications (including vitamins, supplements, or herbal therapies) you give your animal, including the amount and time you give each.
- ▶ Tell your veterinarian about any conditions or diseases your animal may have now or has had in the past.
- ▶ If your animal has been treated for the same disease or condition in the past, tell your veterinarian about the treatment and how well it did or didn't work.
- ▶ If your animal is pregnant or nursing, talk to your veterinarian about

the risks of using this drug.

- ▶ Tell your veterinarian and pharmacist about any medication side effects (including allergic reactions, lack of appetite, diarrhea, itching, hair loss) your animal has developed in the past.

## When should this medication not be used or be used very carefully?

No drug is 100% safe in all patients, but your veterinarian will discuss with you any specific concerns about using this drug in your animal.

This drug **SHOULD NOT** be used in patients:

- ▶ That are allergic to it.
- ▶ That have diabetes.
- ▶ That have stomach or intestinal ulcers.
- ▶ Receiving nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).
- ▶ Undergoing or recovering from surgery or when surgery is anticipated.

This drug should be used **WITH CAUTION** in patients:

- ▶ That have heart or kidney disease.
- ▶ That have a bacterial or fungal infection.
- ▶ That are pregnant.
- ▶ That are young and growing, as dexamethasone can slow growth when used for a long time.

If your animal has any of these conditions or signs, talk to your veterinarian about the potential risks versus benefits.

## What are the side effects of this medication?

### Side effects that usually are not serious include:

- ▶ Vomiting, diarrhea.
- ▶ Mild behavioral changes.
- ▶ Excessive panting (in dogs).
- ▶ Greater appetite, thirst, and need to urinate.
- ▶ With long term (weeks to months) use, patients may also develop weight gain, pot belly, skin and coat changes (eg, hair loss), and muscle weakness.

You don't have to be overly concerned if you see any of these unless they are severe, worsen, or continue to be a problem. Contact your veterinarian if this happens.

### Side effects that may be serious or indicate a serious problem:

- ▶ If your animal stops eating or develops a high fever, black tarry stools, or evidence of blood in the vomit (coffee grounds appearance). These signs may indicate the development of stomach or intestinal ulcers, perforation, or bleeding.
- ▶ Excessive appetite with weight loss may indicate the development of diabetes.

- ▶ Severe behavioral changes (eg, aggression or threatening behavior and actions).
- ▶ Infection. When used at high dosages or long term, dexamethasone causes poor wound healing and makes your pet at risk for developing infections. Because this drug suppresses the immune system, you may not see a fever when there is a serious infection. The only indication of a problem may be a poor appetite, low energy level, or a non-healing wound.

If you see any of these, contact your veterinarian immediately.

### **If my animal gets too much of this medication (an overdose), what should I do?**

If you witness or suspect an overdose, contact your veterinarian or an animal poison control center for further advice. Animal poison control centers that are open 24 hours a day include: **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center** (888-426-4435) and **Pet Poison HELPLINE** (855-764-7661); a consultation fee is charged for these services.

### **How should this medication be given?**

For this medication to work, give it exactly as your veterinarian has prescribed. It's a good idea to always check the prescription label to be sure you are giving the drug correctly.

- ▶ Dexamethasone may be given either with food (preferred) or on an empty stomach. If your pet vomits or acts sick after receiving the drug on an empty stomach, try giving the next dose with food or a small treat. If vomiting continues, contact your veterinarian.
- ▶ Liquid forms of this medication must be measured carefully. Your veterinarian or pharmacist can help by providing special measuring spoons or syringes.
- ▶ If you have difficulty getting your animal to take the medicine, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist for tips to help with dosing and reducing the stress of medication time.
- ▶ This medication can be given for various lengths of time. Be sure you understand how long your veterinarian wants you to continue giving this medication. Prescription refills may be necessary before the therapy will be complete. Before stopping this medication, talk to your veterinarian, as there may be important reasons to continue its use.
- ▶ It is very important to not stop the drug suddenly if your animal has been on the drug for more than a couple of weeks as serious side effects could occur.

### **What should I do if I miss giving a dose of this medication?**

If you miss a dose, give it when you remember, but if it is close to the time for the next dose, skip the dose you missed and give it at the next scheduled time. After that, return to the regular dosing schedule. Do not double-up or give extra doses.

### **How should I store this medication?**

- ▶ Store this medication in the original prescription bottle or an approved dosage reminder container (ie, pill minder) at room temperature.
- ▶ If your veterinarian or pharmacist has made (compounded) a special formulation for your animal, follow the storage recommendations and expiration date for the product.
- ▶ Keep away from children and other animals.

### **Can handling this medication be hazardous to me, my family, or other pets?**

There are no specific precautions required when handling this medication unless you are allergic to it. Wash your hands after handling any medication.

### **How should I dispose of this medication if I don't use it all?**

- ▶ Do not flush this medication down the toilet or wash it down the sink. If a community drug "take-back" program is available, use this option. If there is no take-back program, mix the drug with coffee grounds or cat litter (to make it undesirable to children and animals and unrecognizable to people who might go through your trash), place the mixture in a sealable plastic bag to keep it from leaking out, and throw the bag out with the regular trash.
- ▶ Do not save left over medication for future use or give it to others to use.

### **What other information is important for this medication?**

- ▶ Your veterinarian will need to do laboratory tests and evaluate your dog to properly adjust the dose of this drug.
- ▶ If you are seeing a different veterinarian than usual, be sure to tell them your dog is taking this drug. Dogs that require surgery or are stressed from trauma or illness may require additional glucocorticoid drugs. Also, dexamethasone can affect some laboratory tests.
- ▶ If your animal has been on high doses of dexamethasone, vaccinations may not be effective. Talk to your veterinarian about vaccinations when your animal is receiving the drug.
- ▶ Use of this drug may not be allowed in certain animal competitions. Check rules and regulations before entering your animal in a competition while this medication is being administered.

### **If you have any other questions or concerns about this medication, contact your veterinarian or pharmacist.**