

# NEW ZEALAND DATA SHEET

## 1. PRODUCT NAME

DEXMETHSONE dexamethasone 0.5 mg tablet.

DEXMETHSONE dexamethasone 4 mg tablet.

## 2. QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE COMPOSITION

Each tablet contains either dexamethasone 0.5 mg or 4 mg.

Excipients with known effect: lactose monohydrate and wheat starch (0.5 mg tablet only).  
For the list of excipients, see section 6.1.

## 3. PHARMACEUTICAL FORM

0.5 mg: Round, slightly biconvex white tablets plain on one side and 'DS/0.5' with breakline on the other side.

4 mg: Round, white tablets plain on one side and 'DS/4' with breakline on the other side.

## 4. CLINICAL PARTICULARS

### 4.1 Therapeutic indications

Dexamethasone is indicated for replacement therapy in secondary adrenal insufficiency arising from insufficient corticotrophin secretion. It is not indicated for primary adrenal insufficiency states, such as Addison's disease or after adrenalectomy. In such cases hydrocortisone and fludrocortisone in combination is more appropriate.

Dexamethasone is also indicated for allergic disorders such as bronchial asthma and allergic skin reactions, blood disorders such as leukaemia, thrombocytopenia and haemolytic anaemias, selected collagen and rheumatic disorders (only rarely in rheumatoid arthritis), gastrointestinal disorders such as inflammatory bowel disease, connective tissue disorders such as arteritis, systemic lupus erythematosus (but not scleroderma), some skin diseases such as pemphigus, oedema, some eye disorders, certain neoplastic disorders such as cerebral neoplasm, secondary hypercalcaemia, and acute leukaemia in children. It may also be used to prevent neonatal respiratory distress syndrome and in the diagnosis of Cushing's syndrome.

### 4.2 Dose and method of administration

The dose of dexamethasone varies according to the condition being treated. The tablets are for oral administration in a dose of 4 mg-20 mg daily.

The duration of therapy is dependent on the clinical response of the patient and as soon as improvement is indicated, the dosage should be adjusted to the minimum required to maintain the desired response. Withdrawal of dexamethasone at completion of treatment should be gradual.

### 4.3 Contraindications

- Hypersensitivity to any ingredient
- Systemic infections unless specific anti-infective therapy is given
- Live virus immunisation

### 4.4 Special warnings and precautions for use

Caution is necessary when oral corticosteroids are used in patients with the following conditions and frequent monitoring is necessary:

- Hypertension
- Hypothyroidism
- Congestive Heart failure or recent myocardial infarction
- Liver failure
- Renal insufficiency
- Diabetes mellitus or in those with a family history of diabetes
- Osteoporosis
- Glaucoma
- Patients with a history of severe affective disorders particularly of steroid induced psychoses
- Epilepsy and/or seizure disorder
- Peptic ulceration
- Previous steroid myopathy
- Tuberculosis
- Patients with myasthenia gravis receiving anticholinesterase therapy since corticosteroid use may decrease plasma anticholinesterase activity
- Patients with thromboembolic disorders
- Patients with Duchenne's muscular dystrophy since transient rhabdomyolysis and myoglobinuria have been reported following strenuous physical activity
- Patients with Cushing's disease.

#### **Adrenocortical insufficiency**

Pharmacologic doses of corticosteroids administered for prolonged periods may result in hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) suppression (secondary adrenocortical insufficiency). The degree and duration of adrenocortical insufficiency produced is variable among patients and depends on the dose, frequency, time of administration and duration of therapy.

Symptoms of adrenal insufficiency include: malaise, muscle weakness, mental changes, muscle and joint pain, desquamation of the skin, dyspnoea, anorexia, nausea and vomiting, fever, hypoglycaemia, hypotension and dehydration.

During prolonged courses of corticosteroid therapy sodium intake may need to be reduced and calcium and potassium supplements may be necessary. Monitoring of fluid intake and output and daily weight records may give an early warning of fluid retention.

Acute adrenal insufficiency leading to a fatal outcome may occur if glucocorticoids are withdrawn abruptly, therefore withdrawal of corticosteroids should always be gradual. A degree of adrenal insufficiency may persist for 6 to 12 months; therefore in any situation of stress occurring during that period steroid therapy may need to be reinstated. Since mineralocorticoid secretion may be impaired treatment with salt and/or a mineralocorticoid may also be needed. During prolonged therapy, any intercurrent illness, trauma or surgical procedure will require a temporary increase in dosage.

#### **Antiinflammatory/ Immunosuppressive effects and Infection**

Suppression of the inflammatory response and immune function increases susceptibility to

infections and their severity. The clinical presentation may often be atypical and serious infections such as septicaemia and tuberculosis may be masked and may reach an advanced stage before being recognized when corticosteroids are used. The immunosuppressive effects of glucocorticoids may result in activation of latent infection or exacerbation of intercurrent infections.

Chickenpox is of particular concern since this may be fatal in immunosuppressed patients. Patients without a definite history of chickenpox should be advised to avoid close personal contact with chickenpox or herpes zoster and if exposed they should seek urgent medical attention. Passive immunization is recommended for non-immune patients who do come into contact with chickenpox. If a diagnosis of chickenpox is confirmed the illness warrants specialist care and urgent treatment.

Live vaccines are contraindicated in individuals on high doses of corticosteroids and should be postponed until at least 3 months after stopping corticosteroid therapy.

### **Ocular effects**

Prolonged use of corticosteroids may produce subcapsular cataracts and nuclear cataracts (particularly in children), exophthalmos or increased intraocular pressure, which may result in glaucoma with possible damage to the optic nerves.

Corticosteroids should only be initiated in patients with ocular herpes simplex with appropriate viral cover by ophthalmologists because of the risk of corneal scarring, loss of vision and corneal perforation.

### **Psychiatric effects**

Patients and/or carers should be warned that potentially severe psychiatric reactions may occur. Symptoms typically emerge within a few days or weeks of starting treatment. Most reactions recover after either dose reduction or withdrawal, although specific treatment may be necessary. Patients and/or carers should be encouraged to seek medical advice if worrying psychological symptoms develop, especially if depressed mood or suicidal ideation is suspected.

Particular care is required when considering the use of corticosteroids in patients with existing or previous history of severe affective disorders.

Psychic derangements range from euphoria, insomnia, mood swings, personality changes and severe depression to frank psychotic manifestations.

### **Use in children**

Corticosteroids cause growth retardation in infancy, childhood and adolescence, which may be irreversible and therefore long-term administration of pharmacological doses should be avoided. If prolonged therapy is necessary, treatment should be limited to the minimum suppression of the hypothalamo-pituitary adrenal axis and growth retardation, the growth and development of infants and children should be closely monitored. Treatment should be administered where possible as a single dose on alternate days.

Children are at special risk from raised intracranial pressure.

### **Use in the elderly**

Longterm use in the elderly should be planned bearing in mind the more serious consequences of the common side-effects of corticosteroids in old age, especially osteoporosis, diabetes, hypertension, hypokalaemia, susceptibility to infection and thinning of the skin. Close medical supervision is required to avoid life threatening reactions.

## **Instructions to patients**

Patients should be warned of the long term adverse effects of corticosteroids.

The necessity for increasing dosage in situations of intercurrent stress or infection should be advised. The patient should seek medical advice for any but the most minor infections. The danger of interrupting steroid therapy should be explained and the need to inform medical personnel that corticosteroid medication is being taken.

Patients on a dose reduction regime should be advised of the symptoms of acute glucocorticoid deficiency (faintness, weakness, vomiting).

Patients who are on immunosuppressant doses of corticosteroids should be warned to avoid exposure to chickenpox or measles and, if exposed, to obtain medical advice.

## **4.5 Interaction with other medicines and other forms of interaction**

### **Hepatic microsomal enzyme inducers**

Medicines that induce hepatic enzyme cytochrome P450 isozyme 3A4 such as Phenobarbital, phenytoin, rifampicin, rifabutin, carbamazepine, primidone and aminogluethimide may reduce the therapeutic efficacy of corticosteroids by increasing the rate of metabolism.

### **Hepatic microsomal enzyme inhibitors**

Medicines that inhibit hepatic enzyme cytochrome P450 isozyme 3A4 such as ketoconazole, ciclosporin or ritonavir may decrease glucocorticoid clearance. A reduction in corticosteroid dose may be needed to reduce the risk of adverse effects.

### **Antidiabetic agents**

Corticosteroids may increase blood glucose levels. Patients may need dosage adjustment of any concurrent antidiabetic therapy.

### **Nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)**

Concomitant administration may increase the risk of GI ulceration. Aspirin should be used cautiously in conjunction with corticosteroids in patients with hypothrombinaemia. The renal clearance of salicylates is increased by corticosteroids and steroid withdrawal may result in salicylate intoxication. Patients should be observed closely for adverse effects of either medicine.

### **Anticoagulants**

Response to anticoagulants may be reduced or less often enhanced by corticosteroids. Close monitoring of the INR or prothrombin time is recommended.

### **Antifungals**

The risk of hypokalaemia may be increased with amphotericin.

### **Cardiac glycosides**

There is a risk of toxicity if hypokalaemia occurs due to corticosteroid treatment.

### **Mifepristone**

The effect of corticosteroids may be reduced for 3-4 days after mifepristone.

### **Vaccines**

Live vaccines should not be given to individuals with impaired immune responsiveness. The antibody response to other vaccines may be diminished.

### **Oestrogens**

Oestrogens may potentiate the effects of glucocorticoids. The dose of corticosteroid may need to be adjusted if oestrogen therapy is commenced or stopped.

### **Somatropin**

The growth promoting effect may be inhibited.

### **Sympathomimetics**

There is an increased risk of hypokalaemia if high doses of corticosteroids are given with high doses of salbutamol, salmeterol, terbutaline or formoterol.

### **Diuretics**

Excessive potassium loss may be experienced if glucocorticoids and potassium-depleting diuretics (such as frusemide and thiazides) or carbonic anhydrase inhibitors (such as acetazolamide) are given together.

### **Antacids**

Concurrent use of antacids may decrease absorption of corticosteroids – efficacy may be decreased sufficiently to require dosage adjustments in patients receiving small doses of corticosteroids.

## **4.6 Fertility, pregnancy and lactation**

No data included.

## **4.7 Effects on ability to drive and use machines**

No data included.

## **4.8 Undesirable effects**

### **Reporting of suspected adverse reactions:**

Reporting suspected adverse reactions after authorisation of the medicine is important. It allows continued monitoring of the benefit/risk balance of the medicine. Healthcare professionals are asked to report any suspected adverse reactions <https://nzphvc.otago.ac.nz/reporting/>

### **Body as a whole:**

Leucocytosis, hypersensitivity including anaphylaxis, thromboembolism, fatigue, malaise

### **Cardiovascular:**

Congestive heart failure in susceptible patients, hypertension

### **Gastrointestinal:**

Dyspepsia, nausea, peptic ulceration with perforation and haemorrhage, abdominal distension, abdominal pain, increased appetite which may result in weight gain, diarrhoea, oesophageal ulceration, oesophageal candidiasis, acute pancreatitis

### **Musculoskeletal:**

Proximal myopathy, osteoporosis, vertebral and long bone fractures, avascular osteonecrosis, tendon rupture, myalgia

### **Metabolic/Nutritional:**

Sodium and water retention, hypokalaemic alkalosis, potassium loss, negative nitrogen and calcium balance

### **Skin:**

Impaired healing, hirsutism, skin atrophy, bruising, striae, telangiectasia, acne, increased sweating, may suppress reactions to skin tests, pruritis, rash, urticaria

#### **Endocrine:**

Suppression of the hypothalamopituitary adrenal axis particularly in times of stress as in trauma surgery or illness, growth suppression in infancy, childhood and adolescence, menstrual irregularity and amenorrhoea. Cushingoid facies, weight gain, impaired carbohydrate tolerance with increased requirement for antidiabetic therapy, manifestation of latent diabetes mellitus, increased appetite.

#### **Nervous system:**

Euphoria, psychological dependence, depression, insomnia, dizziness, headache, vertigo, raised intracranial pressure with papilloedema in children, usually after treatment withdrawal. Aggravation of schizophrenia, Aggravation of epilepsy suicidal ideation, mania, delusions, hallucinations, irritability anxiety, insomnia and cognitive dysfunction. In adults the frequency of severe psychiatric reactions has been estimated to be 56%.

#### **Eye disorders:**

Increased intraocular pressure, glaucoma, papilloedema, posterior subcapsular cataracts, exophthalmos, corneal or scleral thinning, exacerbation of ophthalmic viral or fungal disease

#### **Antiinflammatory and Immunosuppressive effects:**

Increased susceptibility to and severity of infections with suppression of clinical symptoms and signs. Opportunistic infections, recurrence of dormant tuberculosis.

#### **Withdrawal symptoms:**

Too rapid a reduction of corticosteroids following prolonged treatment can lead to acute adrenal insufficiency, hypotension and death. A steroid withdrawal syndrome seemingly unrelated to adrenocortical insufficiency may also occur and include symptoms such as anorexia, nausea, vomiting, lethargy, headache, fever, weight loss, and/or hypotension.

## **4.9 Overdose**

For advice on the management of overdose please contact the National Poisons Centre on 0800 POISON (0800 764766).

Adverse effects related to dexamethasone normally develop only after prolonged use. Treatment is symptomatic and where possible the dexamethasone dose should be reduced gradually.

## **5. PHARMACOLOGICAL PROPERTIES**

### **5.1 Pharmacodynamic properties**

Dexamethasone is (11 $\beta$ ,16 $\alpha$ )-9-Fluoro-11, 17, 21-trihydroxy-16-methylpregna1, 4-diene-3, 20-dione. Its molecular formula is C<sub>22</sub>H<sub>29</sub>FO<sub>5</sub> and its molecular weight is 392.5.

#### **Mechanism of action**

Dexamethasone is a synthetic corticosteroid exhibiting both anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressant properties. The anti-inflammatory potency of dexamethasone has been estimated as 25x that of hydrocortisone. It has little mineralocorticoid activity.

### **5.2 Pharmacokinetic properties**

Dexamethasone is readily absorbed after oral administration achieving peak plasma concentrations after one hour. Binding to plasma proteins is less than for most other

corticosteroids.

The biological half-life is approximately 190 minutes. Dexamethasone penetrates tissue and cerebrospinal fluid.

Elimination occurs via metabolism and renal excretion.

### **5.3 Preclinical safety data**

No data included.

## **6. PHARMACEUTICAL PARTICULARS**

### **6.1 List of excipients**

Excipients include lactose monohydrate, magnesium stearate, povidone and wheat starch (0.5 mg tablet) or maize starch (4 mg tablet).

### **6.2 Incompatibilities**

No data included.

### **6.3 Shelf life**

0.5 mg: 36 months  
4 mg: 36 months.

### **6.4 Special precautions for storage**

Store at or below 30°C, protected from light and moisture and kept out of reach of children.

### **6.5 Nature and contents of container**

Plastic HDPE bottle of 30 tablets.

### **6.6 Special precautions for disposal and other handling**

No data included.

## **7. MEDICINE SCHEDULE**

Prescription Medicine

## **8. SPONSOR**

Pharmacy Retailing (NZ) Limited trading as Healthcare Logistics  
58 Richard Pearse Drive  
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## **9. DATE OF FIRST APPROVAL**

Dexamethasone 0.5 mg tablets: 27/09/2012  
Dexamethasone 4 mg tablets: 16/12/2010

## 10. DATE OF REVISION OF THE TEXT

28 August 2019

### SUMMARY TABLE OF CHANGES

Section changed	Summary of new information
All sections revised	Update to the SPC-style format
8	Phone number and email address included
6.3	4 mg tablet: change of shelf life to 3 years.