

A Monthly HIV Medication: What You Need to Know About Injectable Cabenuva

By Rose A. Staden, NP

On January 21, 2021, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) approved Cabenuva, a long-acting injectable drug combination used for HIV treatment. People living with HIV who decide to use this new treatment will receive *injections every four weeks instead of taking daily pills*. This approval is an historic moment in HIV, as it is the first complete long-acting injectable HIV regimen. We hope you are as excited as we are with this huge step forward for HIV treatment.

What is Cabenuva and who is it for?

Cabenuva contains two different types of HIV drugs: the new drug cabotegravir, which is in the integrase strand transfer inhibitor (also known as INSTIs) class of HIV drugs, and rilpivirine, part of the non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor class (also known as NNRTIs or “non-nukes”) class of drugs. If you want to learn more about HIV drug classes and how HIV medications work, we recommend visiting

<https://clinicalinfo.hiv.gov/en/glossary/drug-class>

If you are an adult living with HIV, have had an undetectable viral load (defined as less than 50 copies/mL) for at least 3 months on your current HIV medication, and want to switch to a long-acting regimen, Cabenuva might be right for you. You must have no history of treatment failure (HIV drugs not working to suppress your viral load) and no known or suspected [drug resistance](#) to cabotegravir or rilpivirine. Another requirement is that you do not have active HBV (Hepatitis B) infection, unless you are also taking an oral HBV active regimen. Cabotegravir is not for people who are pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant.

How to Make the Switch

If you want to switch to Cabenuva, you first need to take the pill form of the medications every day for one month. This is to make sure your body can tolerate these medications. The pill form of the two drugs in Cabenuva are Edurant, which is rilpivirine, and Vocabria, the tablet version of cabotegravir.

After you take the pills every day for a month and you know your body can tolerate them, you can start getting monthly injections. You will need to make an appointment with your HIV clinic and attend an office visit to get the injections. You will get two injections in the buttocks once a month. If you know you will need to miss a Cabenuva injection appointment, you can take Vocabria and Edurant pills as a short-term regimen. This might come in handy if you will be travelling out of town for a few weeks. You may also be able to temporarily get the Cabenuva injections at a clinic near where you are travelling in the U.S.

Pros and Cons to Consider before Switching

Now that an injectable HIV medication is available, it gives you more choices for your HIV treatment. This is definitely a good thing, as it gives you options to choose what works best for your life. At the same time, you might want to consider a few things before switching.

Conversation (continued)

Pros:

- May be more convenient than a daily pill
- You only have to think about HIV treatment 12 times a year, instead of every day
- Privacy - no pill bottles that could reveal your HIV status to others
- Easier to adhere to HIV treatment

Cons:

- Taking two pills every day for a month before starting injections
- You will have to make an office visit once a month
 - If you miss this appointment, contact your HIV clinic right away to discuss your options
- The injections (shots) in your buttocks may be uncomfortable and/or painful

Side Effects and Clinical Trials

Before being approved by the FDA, Cabenuva was studied in clinical trials. The names of the trials are ATLAS and FLAIR, and they included more than 1,100 PLWH in 16 countries. The studies found that 48 weeks of monthly injectable Cabenuva suppressed HIV as well as a standard daily three-drug HIV regimen.

Cabenuva is safe and generally well tolerated. The most common side effect is injection site reactions, such as pain, redness or swelling. Other side effects, like fever, fatigue, headache, and muscle pain, nausea, sleep disorders, dizziness and rash, are less common.

Can I afford Cabenuva?

We expect Cabenuva to be covered by health insurance. Sometimes it can take time for individual insurance companies to add new medications to their formulary. Because Cabenuva needs to be given in a clinic, health insurers are likely to cover it as a medical benefit rather than a pharmacy benefit. We also expect that Cabenuva will eventually be covered by [ADAP \(AIDS Drug Assistance Program\)](#) for those who are eligible. It will take some time for ADAP to develop a new system to cover injectable medications given in clinic.

How can I get Cabenuva at the UW Health HIV Care and Prevention Clinic?

Cabenuva is FDA approved and expect this to become available over the next few months. The HIV Care and Prevention Clinic is working hard on how we will provide this medication to our interested patients. Because it is a new way to provide HIV treatment, we need to create some new systems to be able to provide this service safely in clinic. If you are interested, we recommend you ask your health care provider during your next appointment.

What's next?

In the future, you may not need to get Cabenuva injections every month. Researchers are looking at whether it's possible that you only need to get injections every other month, or maybe even less frequently. Injectable cabotegravir alone (one of the drugs in Cabenuva) is also being studied for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

[Learn more at uwhealth.org/hiv](https://uwhealth.org/hiv)

Access to Affordable Care: Resources to Help Pay for Medications

By Adati Tarfa, Pharm.D, M.S

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Have you or your loved ones been struggling with paying for your medications? Economic hardship has made some people face the possibility of losing their health insurance and experiencing difficulties affording their medications. You may have already heard about resources for covering HIV medication costs such as the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), insurance, and the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program.

What if you do not qualify for these programs? What other options do you have to pay for your medications?

If you receive HIV medical care at the HIV Care and Prevention Program Clinic, we recommend connecting with one of our social workers as a first step in exploring available options. There are several other ways to make your prescriptions more affordable, depending on your situation and the medications you need. Your care team can help you with this. Following is a summary of the options and after that more details on each of the options.

Key Takeaways:

- There are patient assistance programs administered by drug companies that can help reduce the cost of or provide free medication, depending on your circumstances
 - You can find a listing of available programs at www.rxassist.org
- Good places to start are by calling 211 or checking for coupons on sites like www.goodrx.com or www.needymeds.org
- Healthcare teams have a lot of experience in helping people explore their options. If you or someone you know is struggling with paying for medications, reach out to the office for assistance

Patient Assistance Programs (PAP)

The first place to look for help are drug Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs). PAPs are also called Assistance Programs or Patient Assistance Foundations. These programs are offered by drug companies to provide free or low-cost coverage of the drugs they manufacture. These drugs can be antiretrovirals or other classes of drugs you or your loved ones are taking.

Who can apply for PAP?

PAPs are designed for people who do not qualify for any other insurance or assistance programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, or ADAP. PAPs are also available for people who have insurance, but have high co-pay amounts or deductibles.

Not every medication has an active PAP, and programs may change from time to time.

You can search this database to see if any of your medications is eligible for a PAP

<https://www.needymeds.org/> and you can also talk with your pharmacist or social worker to learn more about PAPs.

Learn more at uwhealth.org/hiv

Affordable Care (continued)

What information do I need to apply for a PAP?

PAP applications are specific to each drug company; therefore, each application requirement may be different. Some common requirements for PAP are:

- You have been prescribed a medication manufactured by the specific drug company
- You live in the United States or a U.S. Territory
- Verify insurance coverage, if you have any
- You meet program income guidelines

How do PAPs assist individuals?

Different PAPs may help with medications in different ways. Here are some of the most common:

- Reimbursement – a percentage (up to 100%) of your costs are reimbursed after you have purchased the medication and provide a receipt
- Coupons – you will receive coupons that you can redeem at your pharmacy
- Direct discounts at your pharmacy – the program has a direct relationship with the pharmacy and the discount is applied when you purchase the drug at a pharmacy
- Free product – the medication is shipped directly to you

For more information about Patient Assistance Programs, go to <http://www.RxAssist.org>.

RxAssist is a non-profit organization that keeps an updated list of PAPs.

Good Rx

GoodRx is a website you or anyone else can use to check for current prices and discounts on medications. This site can help you find the lowest cost pharmacy for your prescriptions and offers coupons to help reduce the price you pay for your prescriptions. GoodRx is a free service and most pharmacies accept coupons. The coupons must be used in place of insurance coverage.

To search for a medication, go to the below website. If you find a coupon, you can print it out, or if you have a smartphone, you can show the coupon on your phone. Your pharmacist should know how to enter the codes on the coupon to pull up the lowest discount available. <https://www.goodrx.com/>

Non-profit organizations

Some non-profit organizations offer drug discount cards or free medication. There may be different programs depending on where you live. One way to find out about these programs is by calling 211.

Call 211

By calling 211, you can get information and referrals for many types of services across Wisconsin. Anyone can call 211 at any time, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to talk with someone. The representatives can help you find resources for health care, housing, utilities, food, employment, and more and is available in over 180 languages.

- Call 211 or 1-877-947-2211
 - To use video relay service (VRS), dial 877-947-2211
- Text your ZIP code to 898211
- Live chat or search their website at <https://211wisconsin.communityos.org/>

Learn more at uwhealth.org/hiv

Affordable Care (continued)

St Vincent de Paul Charitable Pharmacy

If you or your loved ones live in Dane county, St. Vincent de Paul's Charitable pharmacy may be able to help. If you have a current prescription, have no prescription drug insurance (including Medicare Part D plans) and meet the household-income guidelines, they might be able to fill your prescription. Although they do not stock every medication, they have many medications like antibiotics and contraceptives (birth control pills) and meds to treat common conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

For more information, call the pharmacy at **(608) 268-0355**. Service in Spanish is available. You can read more information on their website at <https://svdpmadison.org/need-help/pharmacy/>

What is the “All of Us” Research Program and how has it joined the fight against COVID-19?

By Sarah L. Esmond

The *All of Us* Research Program, led by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is seeking one million or more people from across the U.S. to drive discoveries that improve the health of generations to come.

People who join *All of Us* are sharing information about their health, habits, and what it's like where they live. By looking for patterns in this information, researchers will learn more about what affects people's health to better understand why people get sick or stay healthy. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is one of many places across the nation helping people enroll in the program.

Since 2017, many community organizations have partnered with *All of Us* at the UW. UW Health is an important partner helping the *All of Us* Wisconsin program at UW to provide information to patients in Madison and Dane County and also offering clinic space for *All of Us* project staff to meet with and enroll participants.

Prior to the COVID pandemic, *All of Us* coordinators and engagement specialists were on the ground in Madison and Dane County to inform the public and assist with enrollment in the program. To date, more than 388,000 people nationwide have signed up, including more than 284,000 who have already completed all of the initial steps of the program. Those initial steps are completing the initial surveys, agreeing to share electronic health records and providing samples for analysis. More than 80% of these participants come from populations that are historically underrepresented in research. In Wisconsin, over 14,000 have fully enrolled.

All of Us is designed to support research on a wide range of health topics, such as Alzheimer's, Cancer or heart disease. Recently, the program was leveraged to support COVID-19 research in three ways:

Antibody Testing

All of Us tested blood samples from more than 24,000 participants. The tests are to see the level of COVID-19 exposure across regions and communities. Evidence was found that suggested the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 was present in the U.S. as far back as December 2019.

COVID-19 Participant Experience (COPE) Survey

All of Us deployed an online survey to better understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on participants' physical and mental health. The survey was designed for those who have been ill with COVID-19 and those who have not. Questions focus on COVID-19 symptoms, stress, social distancing and economic impacts.

Learn more at uwhealth.org/hiv

All of Us (continued)

Electronic Health Records

To date, more than 245,000 people have shared their electronic health records (EHRs) with the program. Sharing EHRs allows researchers to better understand treatments and conditions you have been treated for, as well as how different medicines and treatments work.

For more information about the *All of Us* program or to enroll, please visit [Allofus.wisc.edu](https://allofus.wisc.edu)

Questions? Contact the *All of Us* team at UW-Madison:

- Tel. (888) 294-2661
- Email allofus@hslc.wisc.edu