Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Opportunistic Infections Among HIV-Exposed and HIV-Infected Children

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Isosporiasis (Cystoisosporiasis)  

Isospora belli (Cystoisosporis belli) is an intestinal coccidian parasite in the phylum Apicomplexa. It was first linked with human disease in 1915 and is believed to infect only humans.  

Infected individuals pass non-infective, unsporulated (immature) oocysts in their stools. The oocysts must sporulate (mature) outside the host, in favorable environmental conditions, to become infective. Therefore, direct person-to-person transmission is unlikely. Infection results from ingestion of sporulated oocysts, such as in contaminated food or water. In the proximal small intestine, the ingested oocysts release sporozoites that invade the intestinal epithelial cells. They then enter an asexual reproduction stage that infects neighboring epithelial cells. Sexual gametocytes are also produced; their fertilization results in unsporulated oocysts, which are shed in stool.

Clinical Manifestations

On the basis of limited data, the incubation period averages approximately 1 week but may range from several days to 2 or more weeks; symptom onset may be acute or insidious. The most common symptom is watery (non-bloody) diarrhea, which can be profuse and result in dehydration, weight loss, and malabsorption. Affected people also can have crampy abdominal pain, flatulence, nausea, vomiting, anorexia, and low-grade fever. Biliary disease (cholecystitis/cholangiopathy) and reactive arthritis also have been reported. Whereas immunocompetent hosts typically have self-limited infection, chronic, debilitating diarrhea is common in untreated HIV-infected patients.
**Diagnosis**

Isosporiasis is diagnosed by identifying *I. belli* oocysts in stool (or duodenal aspirates using the Entero-Test) or developmental stages of the parasite in biopsy specimens (such as of the small intestine). The oocysts are relatively large (23–33 μm long by 10–19 μm wide) but may be difficult to find. Oocysts may be shed in low numbers even by individuals who have severe diarrhea, which underscores the utility of repeated stool examinations, using methods that concentrate and highlight the parasite. Although staining is frequently variable, the organism can be identified with use of a modified acid-fast stain, staining bright red on a green background. The organism also autofluoresces when viewed by ultraviolet fluorescence microscopy. Blunting and clubbing of villi and hypertrophied crypts can be seen on small bowel biopsy. There also may be an increase in lymphocytes, plasma cells, and eosinophils in the lamina propria. Serologic tests for diagnosing *I. belli* infection are not available. Peripheral eosinophilia occurs in up to half of patients. Polymerase chain reaction is a promising diagnostic tool but is not yet commercially available.

**Prevention Recommendations**

**Preventing Exposure**

Careful hand washing and thorough washing of fruits and vegetables are recommended (AIII). As always, travelers to endemic areas should avoid untreated water for drinking, brushing teeth, and in ice, as well as unpeeled fruits and vegetables (BIII).

**Preventing Disease**

There are no U.S. recommendations for primary prophylaxis of isosporiasis. Prophylaxis with trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole (TMP-SMX, 160 mg and 800 mg, respectively) was effective in preventing isosporiasis in adults with World Health Organization stage 2 or 3 HIV infection in Cote d’Ivoire. In addition, in an observational study, the incidence of isosporiasis decreased after widespread availability of cART, except among persons with CD4 counts less than 50 cells/μL. Although there have been no studies in children, the relationship between severe immunosuppression and disease in adults suggests that initiation of cART in HIV-infected children before development of severe immunodeficiency may reduce the incidence or prevent recurrence of isosporiasis (CIII).

**Treatment Recommendations**

**Treating Disease**

TMP-SMX is the recommended treatment for isosporiasis. Three randomized trials performed in HIV-infected adults in Haiti not receiving antiretroviral therapy have demonstrated the effectiveness of various regimens. In the first study, TMP-SMX (160 mg and 800 mg, respectively) was administered 4 times daily for 10 days and then twice daily for 3 weeks. Improvement in diarrheal symptoms occurred within a few days, but 7 of 15 patients (47%) had recurrent symptoms within a mean of 8 +/- 5.8 weeks following completion of therapy. In the second study, TMP-SMX (160 mg and 800 mg, respectively) was administered 4 times daily for 10 days; subjects were then randomized to 1 of 3 secondary prophylaxis arms. At the completion of the initial 10 days of TMP-SMX, all 32 participants had resolution of diarrhea and abdominal pain as well as stool samples that tested negative for *I. belli*. In the third study, subjects were randomized to receive either TMP-SMX (160 mg and 800 mg, respectively) or ciprofloxacin (500 mg) twice daily for 7 days. TMP-SMX treatment resulted in cessation of diarrhea in all 10 patients and negative results on stool examination at day 7 in 9 of the 10, while ciprofloxacin resulted in resolution of diarrhea in 10 of 12 patients and 9 of 12 with negative stool examinations. On the basis of these studies in adults, the recommended treatment for HIV-infected children is TMP-SMX, 5 mg/kg per dose of the trimethoprim component, given twice daily, for 10 days (AII*). If symptoms worsen or persist, the TMP-SMX dose may be increased to 5 mg/kg/dose of the trimethoprim component, 3 to 4 times daily, for 10 days or the duration of treatment lengthened (up to 3–4
weeks) (CIII). Intravenous administration of TMP-SMX should be considered for patients with potential or documented malabsorption.

Daily pyrimethamine (50–75 mg in adults), with folinic acid (10–25 mg/day) to prevent myelosuppression, may be an effective therapy and is typically the alternative for patients who are intolerant of TMP-SMX (BIII). Other agents to consider in a TMP-SMX-intolerant patient include ciprofloxacin (CI*) or nitazoxanide (CIII). Based on the study previously cited, ciprofloxacin is less effective than TMP-SMX, and nitazoxanide has only been studied in small numbers of HIV-uninfected children and adults. As reviewed above, the relationship between the use of cART and recovery from isosporiasis remains unknown. However, because the incidence of isosporiasis has been reported to be higher in those with more severe immune suppression, it seems reasonable to initiate cART in children with isosporiasis not already receiving cART to prevent recurrence (CIII).

As with all causes of diarrhea, supportive care, including replenishment of fluids and electrolytes, is essential (AIII).

**Monitoring and Adverse Events (Including IRIS)**

Immune reconstitution inflammatory syndrome has not been reported in association with treatment of isosporiasis. In general, recommended treatment regimens are well tolerated.

**Managing Treatment Failure**

Reports of treatment failure are relatively uncommon. Mixed data regarding treatment outcomes are available for albendazole, doxycycline, roxithromycin, and spiramycin.

**Preventing Recurrence**

Following treatment of an acute episode, secondary prophylaxis should be continued in those with severe immunosuppression (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] immunologic category 3) for an indefinite period until sustained immunologic recovery is observed (AII*). Pape et al., randomized HIV-infected adults completing therapy for acute infection to one of three regimens: TMP-SMX (160 mg and 800 mg, respectively) three times per week, sulfadoxine (500 mg) plus pyrimethamine (25 mg) once weekly, or placebo. The two active treatment arms were equally effective in preventing relapse. However, the combination of sulfadoxine and pyrimethamine is not recommended in the United States because of increased risk of severe cutaneous reactions. In another study, adult patients with a clinical response following treatment of acute infection with TMP-SMX or ciprofloxacin received secondary prophylaxis for 10 weeks with the same agent as treatment, but at reduced doses: TMP-SMX (160 mg and 800 mg, respectively) or ciprofloxacin (500 mg) three times per week. The two agents were equally effective in preventing recurrence during the monitoring period. Based on these findings in adults, acceptable regimens in HIV-infected children include TMP-SMX, 2.5 mg/kg body weight twice daily of the trimethoprim component, administered 3 days per week. The 3 days per week can be three consecutive days or an alternating-day schedule (e.g., Monday-Wednesday-Friday) (AII*). Patients intolerant of TMP-SMX may receive pyrimethamine (plus folinic acid) as secondary prophylaxis (BIII). Ciprofloxacin three times weekly can be considered as a second-line alternative (CI*).

**Discontinuing Secondary Prophylaxis**

There are no data to provide guidance regarding the duration of secondary prophylaxis. All patients should be monitored for recurrence (BIII) and those with severe immunosuppression may require secondary prophylaxis indefinitely (CIII). Secondary prophylaxis can probably be discontinued in patients who demonstrate sustained recovery from severe immunosuppression. In adults, a CD4 count >200 cells/μL for at least 6 months is recommended to discontinue secondary prophylaxis. In children, a reasonable time to discontinue secondary prophylaxis would be after sustained improvement in CD4 count or CD4 percentage from CDC immunologic category 3 to 1 or 2.
References


18. Dionisio D, Sterrantino G, Meli M, Leoncini F, Orsi A, Nicoletti P. Treatment of isosporiasis with combined...
Table: Dosing Recommendations for Prevention and Treatment of Isosporiasis (Cystoisosporiasis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indication</th>
<th>First Choice</th>
<th>Alternative</th>
<th>Comments/Special Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Prophylaxis</strong></td>
<td>There are no U.S. recommendations for primary</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Initiation of cART to avoid advanced immunodeficiency may reduce incidence;</td>
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<td>prophylaxis of isosporiasis.</td>
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<td>TMP-SMX prophylaxis may reduce incidence.</td>
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<td><strong>Secondary Prophylaxis</strong></td>
<td>If Severe Immunosuppression:</td>
<td>Pyrimethamine 1 mg/kg body weight (maximum 25 mg) plus folinic acid, 10–25 mg</td>
<td>Consider discontinuing secondary prophylaxis in a patient receiving cART after</td>
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<td>• Administer TMP-SMX 2.5 mg/kg body weight of TMP</td>
<td>by mouth once daily.</td>
<td>sustained improvement from severe immunosuppression (from CDC immunologic category 3 to</td>
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<td>component twice daily by mouth 3 times per week</td>
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<td>CD4 values that fall within category 1 or 2) for longer than 6 months.</td>
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<td>In adults, the dose of pyrimethamine for secondary prophylaxis (25 mg daily) is lower</td>
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<td>than the dose for treatment (50–75 mg daily), but no similar data exist for children.</td>
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<td>Thus, the recommended dosing for secondary prophylaxis in children is 1 mg/kg per dose</td>
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<td>(maximum 25 mg) once daily.</td>
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<td>Ciprofloxacin is generally not a drug of first choice in children due to increased</td>
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<td>incidence of adverse events, including events related to joints and/or surrounding</td>
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<td>tissues.</td>
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<td><strong>Treatment</strong></td>
<td>TMP-SMX 5 mg/kg body weight of TMP component given</td>
<td>Pyrimethamine 1 mg/kg body weight plus folinic acid 10–25 mg by mouth once</td>
<td>If symptoms worsen or persist, the TMP-SMX dose may be increased to 5 mg/kg/day given</td>
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<td>twice daily by mouth for 10 days</td>
<td>daily for 14 days</td>
<td>3–4 times daily by mouth for 10 days or the duration of treatment may be</td>
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<td>lengthened. Duration of treatment with pyrimethamine has not been well</td>
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Key to Acronyms: CD4 = CD4 T lymphocyte; CDC = Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; cART = combination antiretroviral therapy; TMP-SMX = trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole

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