Drug Safety Update

MHRA

Latest advice for medicines users

The monthly newsletter from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and its independent advisor the Commission on Human Medicines

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Contents

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is the government agency responsible for ensuring that medicines and medical devices work and are acceptably safe.

The Commission on Human Medicines gives independent advice to ministers about the safety, quality, and efficacy of medicines. The Commission is supported in its work by Expert Advisory Groups that cover various therapeutic areas of medicine.

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Summary

First, to support healthcare professionals during the coronavirus pandemic, we highlight key advice and guidance issued so far by the MHRA and Commission on Human Medicines on medicines safety and pharmacovigilance.

The MHRA is working closely with DHSC and other healthcare partners on coronavirus (COVID-19; see guidance page) and we are prioritising work including supporting and authorising the development of vaccines, clinical trials of medicines, and managing the supply of medicines and healthcare products. We will continue to monitor the safety of medicinal products and provide updates through our information channels and alert systems.

Please continue to report suspected adverse drug reactions to the Yellow Card Scheme. We ask for all reactions to be reported electronically via the Yellow Card website, Yellow Card app, or clinical IT systems (see page 2 for more information).

Finally, as for all monthly issues of Drug Safety Update, we include recent letters and alerts sent to healthcare professionals, including the recall of 150 microgram and 300 microgram Emerade auto-injectors (also referred to as pens) from patients due to an error in one component of the auto-injector believed to cause some pens to fail to activate and deliver adrenaline (page 4).

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Coronavirus (COVID-19): latest guidance for medicines safety

Please note, the information in this article reflects understanding at the time of publication on 27 April 2020 and will not be updated. See guidance on COVID-19 for all our latest information, including after publication of this article.

How the MHRA is supporting the response to COVID-19

The MHRA is working closely with DHSC and other healthcare partners on coronavirus (COVID-19; see guidance page).

We are prioritising work including:

- Supporting and authorising the development of vaccines
- Clinical trials of medicines
- Managing the supply of medicines and healthcare products

Reporting side effects and safety concerns

The Yellow Card Scheme is vital in helping the MHRA monitor the safety of all healthcare products in the UK to ensure they are acceptably safe for patients and users.

During the pandemic, healthcare professionals, patients, and caregivers are asked to submit all suspected side effect reports electronically to enable us to process reports while working remotely. If you sent a Yellow Card by post after 17 March 2020, and you have not received an acknowledgement of your report, you may wish to resubmit your suspected side effect electronically.

You can report suspected side effects electronically via:

- the Yellow Card website
- the free Yellow Card app; download now from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store
- some clinical IT systems (EMIS/SystmOne/Vision/MiDatabank) for healthcare professionals

For anyone that does not have online access to report a suspected side effect to the Yellow Card scheme, call 0800 731 6789 for free, Monday to Friday between 9:00am and 5:00pm. You can leave a message outside of these hours and someone from the Yellow Card team will get back to you.

Please continue to use the Yellow Card website to report information on suspected problems or incidents involving a defective medicine, a falsified product, and safety concerns associated with e-cigarettes or their refill containers (e-liquids). See website guidance for guidance on reporting medical devices adverse incidents.

Recent advice on medicines safety concerns

The Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) continues to advise government ministers and MHRA on the safety, efficacy, and quality of medicinal products, including medicines and vaccines. During the pandemic, an Expert Working Group of CHM is considering the latest safety data relating to COVID-19.

We will continue to monitor the safety of medicinal products, and provide updates through our information channels and alert systems. See information on the Central Alerting System page on COVID-19 alerts and registration.

Ibuprofen and NSAIDs

The Expert Working Group has advised there is currently insufficient evidence to establish a link between use of ibuprofen, or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), and susceptibility to contracting COVID-19 or the worsening of its symptoms (see MHRA statement, 14 April 2020). See also joint alert to healthcare professionals from the MHRA, NHS England and NHS Improvement, and NICE.

Antihypertensives

We have advised that is no evidence from clinical or epidemiological studies to support the concern that treatment with angiotensin-converting-enzyme inhibitors (ACE inhibitors or ACE-i) or angiotensin-receptor blockers (ARBs) might worsen COVID-19 infection (see MHRA statement, 27 March 2020).

Chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine

We have also issued guidance on chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine (see MHRA statement, 25 March 2020). Clinical trials are ongoing to test chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine in the treatment of COVID-19 or to prevent COVID-19 infection. Until we have clear, definitive evidence that these treatments are safe and effective for the treatment of COVID-19, these agents should only be used for this purpose within a clinical trial.

Information on Direct Healthcare Professional Communications

We are also working with industry on flexible approaches to regulation during the COVID-19 outbreak. These include allowing dissemination of Direct Healthcare Professional Communications (DHPCs) and educational materials to healthcare professionals via email rather than sending hard copies. DHPC letters will continue to be highlighted in Drug Safety Update – see Letters sent in March 2020 on page 4.

A call to continue reporting and discussing side effects with patients

We thank all those that participated in raising awareness about the importance of reporting Yellow Cards during the February 2020 adverse drug reaction (ADR) awareness week, which saw an increase in reporting.

With the national health system is focussed on the pandemic response, Yellow Card reporting has decreased, especially from healthcare professionals. We would like to reassure healthcare professionals that the Yellow Card Scheme continues to operate as usual and that concerns about side effects should still be reported to us. We support healthcare professionals in continuing to discuss side effects in patient consultations, albeit remotely, and in encouraging self-reporting of side effects by patients and caregivers using our website or App.

We realise patients may have concerns about their medicines and we have received a small number of Yellow Card reports associated with treatment non-compliance. Please continue to encourage patients to speak to a healthcare professional if they are worried about their health or the medicines they are taking.

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Letters and drug alerts sent to healthcare professionals in March 2020

Letters

In March 2020, the following letters were sent to relevant healthcare professionals:

- Esmya 5mg (ulipristal acetate) for uterine fibroids: not to be used during ongoing review of liver injury risk – see Drug Safety Update, March 2020 and Class 2 recall notice
- Adoport (tacrolimus) 2mg capsules: limited number of packs with Italian foil
- Fennings Paracetamol 120mg/5 ml Oral Suspension (Crescent Pharma Ltd): 200ml pack size on a GSL authorisation; only to be supplied under the supervision of a pharmacist
- Ativan 4mg/ml Solution for Injection (Lorazepam): interim supply of Irish stock to mitigate supply disruption
- Zentiva Paracetamol 500mg Capsules (pack size 100 capsules) supplied with incorrect information in Patient Information Leaflet

We are also aware of the following key letters sent to healthcare professionals so far in April 2020:

- Noradrenaline (Norepinephrine) 4mg/4ml concentrate for solution for infusion: temporary supply of a different presentation in market and changes to the instructions
- Suxamethonium: temporary foreign label product - Label and patient information leaflet (PIL) is in Portuguese

Recall of Emerade adrenaline auto-injectors

Pharmaswiss Česka republika s.r.o. (an affiliate of Bausch & Lomb UK Limited) has recalled all unexpired batches of Emerade 150 microgram and 300 microgram auto-injectors (also referred to as pens) from patients due to an error in one component of the auto-injector believed to cause some pens to fail to activate and deliver adrenaline.

- Class 2 Medicines Recall: Emerade 150 micrograms solution for injection in pre-filled syringe, PL 33616/0013 (EL(20)A/14). Issued 3 March 2020
- Class 2 Medicines Recall: Emerade 300 micrograms solution for injection in pre-filled syringe, PL 33616/0014 (EL(20)A/20). Issued 7 April 2020

Other recalls and notices issued in March 2020

Class 2 Medicines Recall: AOP Orphan Pharmaceuticals AG, Tetrabenazine 25 mg tablets, PL 21344/0015, (EL (20)A/13). Issued 2 March 2020. AOP Orphan Pharmaceuticals AG is recalling all unexpired stock of batch T1704UK of Tetrabenazine 25mg tablets (from pharmacies and wholesalers) as a precautionary measure due to out of specification results obtained during routine stability testing.

Class 4 Medicines Defect Information: Rosemont Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Paracetamol 250mg/5ml Oral Suspension (500ml) PL 00427/0078 EL (20)A/19. Issued 30 March 2020. There is an error in the barcode and GTIN number of the label on the bottle of the listed batches. When identifying the product strength, use the labelled contents' not the strength stated when the barcode is scanned or the GTIN number on the dm&d browser website.

Class 4 Medicines Defect Information: Zamadol SR 50 mg prolonged-release hard capsules, PL 46302/0149 (EL (20)A/18). Issued 24 March 2018. Mylan UK Healthcare Ltd has informed us that the GTIN barcode applied on the listed batches is incorrect. The GTIN barcode should not be used for any dispensing activities for the affected batches.

Class 4 FMD Medicines Information: WDA(H) 50340 HMS Wholesale Limited, Multiple Products, (EL (20)A/17). Issued 19 March 2020. The MHRA is currently investigating an incident where several medicines appear to have left the legal supply chain and have then been re-introduced via WDA(H) 50340 HMS Wholesale Limited. Check stocks for the listed products. If any relevant packs are identified, quarantine and notify the MHRA.

Class 4 Medicines Defect Information: Aripiprazole 1mg/ml Oral Solution, PL 04569/1667, (EL(20)A/15). Issued 11 March 2020. Mylan UK Healthcare Ltd has informed us that a product complaint has been received relating to crystalline precipitate being observed during bottle use. Inspect the product before administration and only use if clear and free from crystalline precipitate.

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