

Prescribing and Medicines Optimisation Guidance

Issue: 51

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1. National Patient Safety Alert - NHS England and NHS Improvement - Inappropriate anticoagulation of patients with a mechanical heart valve. ([Link](#))

Early in the Covid-19 pandemic, published guidance supported clinical teams to review patients treated with a vitamin K antagonist (VKA) and where appropriate change their medication to an alternative anticoagulant (eg a low molecular weight heparin (LMWH) or a direct oral anticoagulant (DOAC)). This was partly to reduce the frequency of clinic attendance for monitoring, and thus reduce the risk to patients. The guidance listed exceptions where specific patients should not be switched from a VKA, including patients with a mechanical heart valve.

However, incidents have been reported of patients with a mechanical heart valve being switched to a LMWH or a DOAC. This alert asks GPs and other NHS providers of anticoagulation services to identify any patients who have a record of a mechanical heart valve and are receiving a DOAC, and to urgently review these patients to ensure they are on the most appropriate anticoagulation therapy and monitoring.

2. MHRA drug safety update: Chloramphenicol eye drops containing borax or boric acid buffers: use in children younger than 2 years ([Link](#))

Following a review of the available toxicological data and a calculation of daily exposure to boron from a typical dosing regimen, the MHRA have concluded that the balance between the benefits and risks of chloramphenicol eye drops containing borax or boric acid remains positive for children aged 0 to 2 years.

Chloramphenicol eye drops can be safely administered to children aged 0 to 2 years where antibiotic eye drop treatment is indicated.

3. MHRA drug safety update: Herbal and homeopathic medicines: reminder to be vigilant for suspected adverse reactions and to report them to the Yellow Card scheme ([Link](#))

Healthcare professionals are reminded to be vigilant for suspected adverse reactions associated with the use of herbal and homeopathic medicines and interactions with

other medicines and report suspicions to the MHRA's Yellow Card scheme (<https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>).

- If an adverse reaction is suspected, ask patients whether they are taking any herbal or homeopathic medicines and include a full list of medicines in the Yellow Card report.
- Enquire if patients are taking herbal or homeopathic medicines during routine medicine reviews and remind them to check they are using licensed products (see advice to provide to patients below).
- Remind patients to read the safety information provided in the patient information for herbal and homeopathic medicines, including when to seek medical advice.

4. SPS: Equivalent doses of oral benzodiazepines. ([Link](#))

Benzodiazepines are the most commonly used anxiolytics and hypnotics. There are major differences in potency between different benzodiazepines and this difference in potency is important when switching from one benzodiazepine to another. Benzodiazepines also differ markedly in the speed in which they are metabolised and eliminated. With repeated daily dosing accumulation occurs and high concentrations can build up in the body (mainly in fatty tissues). The degree of sedation that they induce also varies, making it difficult to determine exact equivalents. This Q&A provides dose equivalents to allow switching between agents.

5. MHRA press release: First progestogen-only contraceptive pills to be available to purchase from pharmacies ([Link](#))

Progestogen-only (desogestrel) contraceptive pills will be available from pharmacies without prescription, increasing choice for women in the ways in which they can access contraception. The product names are Lovima 75 microgram film-coated tablets and Hana 75 microgram film-coated tablets. These have been reclassified to allow them to be purchased from a pharmacy without a prescription.

6. NICE guideline: Acne vulgaris: management (NG198). ([Link](#))

This guideline covers management of acne vulgaris in primary and specialist care. It includes advice on topical and oral treatments (including antibiotics and retinoids), treatment using physical modalities, and the impact of acne vulgaris on mental health and wellbeing.

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Previous bulletins can be found at: <https://gp-portal.westhampshireccg.nhs.uk/medicines/covid-19-medicines-information/covid-19-medicines-optimisation-bulletins/>