Drug News
藥 物 情 報

Issue Number 127

This is a monthly digest of local and overseas drug safety news released by the Drug Office of the Department of Health in May 2020 with relevant information update before publish. For the latest news and information, please refer to public announcements or the website of the Drug Office of the Department of Health (http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk).

Safety Update

EU: Leuprorelin depot medicines: PRAC recommends new measures to avoid handling errors

On 15 May 2020, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) of the European Union (EU) announced that it's safety committee, the Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC), is recommending measures to avoid handling errors in the preparation and administration of leuprorelin depot medicines.

A review by the PRAC found that handling errors resulted in some patients receiving insufficient amounts of their medicine. The errors reported included incorrect use of the needle or syringe, causing the medicine to leak from the syringe, and failure to inject leuprorelin properly.

The Committee is therefore recommending that only healthcare professionals familiar with the preparation steps for leuprorelin depot medicines should prepare and administer the medicines to patients. Patients should not prepare or inject these medicines themselves.

In Hong Kong, there are 11 registered pharmaceutical products containing leuprorelin, and all products are prescription-only medicines. As on 5 June 2020, the Department of Health (DH) has received 8 cases of adverse drug reaction (ADR) related to leuprorelin, but these cases are not related to handling errors. The DH will remain vigilant on safety update of the drugs issued by other overseas drug regulatory authorities.

EU: PRAC concludes review of new information on the known risk of breast cancer with hormone replacement therapy

On 15 May 2020, the EMA announced that the PRAC recommends updating the current safety information for hormone replacement therapy (HRT) used to treat symptoms of the menopause.

The updates are based on evidence from a large study published in The Lancet in August 2019, which confirmed the known higher risk of breast cancer in women using HRT. Furthermore, the results showed that the risk may continue to be increased for ten years or more after stopping HRT, if it has been used for more than five years.

Having assessed all available evidence, the PRAC recommends changes in the product information for implementation by authorities to reflect the following updates:

- For combined oestrogen-progestagen and oestrogen-only HRT, the updated product information will reflect that the known higher risk of breast cancer in women using HRT becomes clear after approximately three years of use. After stopping HRT, the extra risk will decrease with time, and the time needed to return to baseline depends on the duration of prior HRT use. The new information indicates that the risk may persist for ten years or more in women who have used HRT for more than five years.
- For conjugated oestrogens/bazedoxifene (Duavive), the effect on the risk of breast cancer is unknown. However, as Duavive contains conjugated oestrogens, the product information will be updated to reflect the new information related to oestrogen-only therapy.
- For tibolone-containing HRT, the updated product information will reflect that no data for persistence of risk after stopping treatment are available, but a similar pattern cannot be ruled out.
- For low dose vaginally applied oestrogen, the product information will be updated to reflect that the evidence has not shown an increase in

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breast cancer risk in women who had no breast cancer in the past. It is not known if it can be safely used in women who had breast cancer in the past.

The PRAC stresses that, as already indicated in the product information of HRT medicines, women should only take HRT for the treatment of symptoms of menopause at the lowest dose and for the shortest possible time that works for them. Women should also have regular check-ups, including breast screening, in line with current recommendations, and seek medical attention if they notice any changes in their breasts.

In Hong Kong, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) products are registered pharmaceutical products. As on 5 June 2020, the DH has not received any case of ADR related to HRT. Related news was previously issued by the United Kingdom Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and Singapore Health Sciences Authority (HSA), and was reported in the Drug News Issue No. 118. The DH issued a letter to inform local healthcare professionals to draw their attention on 2 September 2019. In light of the above EMA's announcement, the matter will be discussed by the Registration Committee of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board.

Singapore: Use of hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®) in the context of COVID 19 - Risk of QT prolongation and drug / drug interactions

On 29 May 2020, the HSA announced that a Dear Healthcare Professional Letter has been issued by Sanofi to highlight to healthcare professionals the known risk of QT prolongation and drug-drug interactions associated with hydroxychloroquine and that prescription of hydroxychloroquine for the management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is off-label.

A significant number of serious and life-threatening cases of QT prolongation, torsade de pointe, syncope, cardiac arrest, and sudden death in the context of COVID-19 management has been reported to Sanofi. In most of these cases, hydroxychloroquine was co-administered with other drugs known to induce QT prolongation (e.g., azithromycin). The majority of patients recovered after hydroxychloroquine discontinuation. In view of the seriousness of these cases, healthcare professionals are advised to show caution in using hydroxychloroquine off-label in the management of COVID-19. In particular, in patients with specific risk factors (e.g., co-administration of hydroxychloroquine with other drugs known to prolong the QT interval, such as some anti-infectives, including azithromycin), cardiac electrocardiogram (ECG) monitoring at hospital is advised.

In Hong Kong, there are 5 registered pharmaceutical products containing hydroxychloroquine, and all products are prescription-only medicines. As on 5 June 2020, the DH has received 4 cases of ADR related to hydroxychloroquine, but these cases are not related to heart rhythm problems.

Related news on the risk of heart rhythm problems associated with the use of hydroxychloroquine was previously issued by various overseas drug regulatory authorities, and was reported in the Drug News Issue No. 126. Adverse effects and precautions about heart rhythm problems associated with the use of hydroxychloroquine are documented in overseas reputable drug references such as the "Martindale: The Complete Drug Reference". The DH will remain vigilant on safety update of the drugs issued by other overseas drug regulatory authorities.

Drug Recall

DH endorsed recall of Thioridazine HCl Tablets 25mg (Neuraxpharm)

On 4 May 2020, the DH endorsed two licensed drug wholesalers, namely Trackcircle.com Limited and Link Healthcare Hong Kong Limited to recall Thioridazine HCl Tablets 25mg (Neuraxpharm), from the market due to possible quality defect of the product. The product is an unregistered pharmaceutical product imported for the treatment of particular patients.

The DH received notifications from the above wholesalers that serious deficiency was noted in the Good Manufacturing Practice of the manufacturer of the active pharmaceutical ingredient in the product, and therefore the quality of the finished product cannot be ascertained. As a precautionary measure, the wholesalers are voluntarily recalling the product from the market.

The product, containing thioridazine, is a prescription medicine used for the treatment of

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schizophrenia. According to the wholesalers, the product has solely been supplied to the Hospital Authority for the treatment of particular patients.

People who have used the above product should contact their doctors for appropriate arrangement.

As on 5 June 2020, the department has not received any adverse reports in connection with the product concerned. A notice was posted on the Drug Office website on 4 May 2020 to alert the public of the product recall.

DH endorsed recall of one batch of Tepadina Powder for Infusion 100mg (HK-63411)

On 13 May 2020, the DH endorsed a licensed drug wholesaler, Hind Wing Co. Ltd. (Hind Wing), to recall one batch (batch number: 1709191/2) of Tepadina Powder for Infusion 100mg (HK-63411) from the market as a precautionary measure due to a potential defect of the product.

The DH received notification from Hind Wing on 13 May 2020 that the vial seal and closure may be defective in the affected batch. This might affect the quality of the product. As a precautionary measure, Hind Wing is voluntarily recalling the affected batch from the market.

The product, containing thiotepa, is a prescription medicine used for the treatment of various cancers. According to Hind Wing, the affected batch has been supplied to the Hospital Authority, a private hospital and pharmacies.

Members of the public should consult healthcare professionals if in doubt or feeling unwell after using the product.

As on 5 June 2020, the DH has not received any adverse reaction reports in connection with the product. Press release was posted on the Drug Office website on 13 May 2020 to alert the public of the product recall.

Drug Incident

Medical centre director jailed for possessing counterfeit vaccines

A medical centre and a male company director were prosecuted for possession of vaccines bearing a forged trademark for sale or for any purpose under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance. The male company director was convicted and sentenced to four months' imprisonment and the medical centre was fined $20,000 by the Kwun Tong Magistrates' Court on 5 June 2020.

In July 2019, officers of the Department of Health participated in a joint enforcement operation with the Customs and Excise Department on allegation that a medical centre was using counterfeit human papillomavirus vaccines. A total of 76 boxes of counterfeit vaccines were seized from a medical centre in Kwun Tong during the raid. Under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance, the maximum penalty for selling or possessing any goods with a forged trademark is a fine of $500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Registered healthcare professionals should procure registered pharmaceutical products from licensed wholesale dealers. List of licensed drug dealers are available in the Drug Office's website. Information on licensed Wholesale Dealers can also be found through the "Search Drug Dealers" section in the Drug Office's website.

For details, please refers to: https://www.customs.gov.hk/en/publication_press/press/index_id_2949.html

DH urged public not to buy or use topical products with undeclared controlled ingredients

On 18 May 2020, the DH appealed to the public not to buy or use two topical products named Zangyao Xuanduwang and Qi Du Zang Wang Gao as they were found to contain undeclared controlled drug ingredients.

Acting upon a public complaint, the DH purchased samples of the above two products for analysis. Test results from the Government Laboratory revealed that the product samples contained undeclared Part 1 poisons under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138):

Product name	Part 1 poisons found
Zangyao Xuanduwang	Clobetasol propionate, miconazole and ketoconazole
Qi Du Zang Wang Gao	Miconazole and ketoconazole

A joint operation with the Police was conducted against a retail stall in Sau Mau Ping on 18 May

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2020. During the operation, a 65-year-old man was arrested by the Police for suspected illegal sale and possession of Part 1 poisons and unregistered pharmaceutical products.

Clobetasol propionate is a steroid substance for treating inflammation. Inappropriate or excessive application of steroids could cause skin problems and body-wide side effects like moon face, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, muscle atrophy, adrenal insufficiency and osteoporosis. Products containing clobetasol propionate should be used under a doctor's directions and be supplied in a pharmacy under the supervision of a registered pharmacist upon a doctor's prescription. Miconazole and ketoconazole are used for the treatment of fungal infections with side effects including local irritation and sensitivity reactions.

Press release was posted on the Drug Office website on 18 May 2020 to alert the public of the drug incident.

A product containing any western drug ingredient must be registered under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance before it can be sold in Hong Kong. Part 1 poisons should be sold at registered pharmacies under the supervision of registered pharmacists. Illegal sale or possession of Part 1 poisons and unregistered pharmaceutical products are offences under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138). The maximum penalty is a fine of $100,000 and two years' imprisonment for each offence. Antibiotics can only be supplied at registered pharmacies by registered pharmacists or under their supervision and upon a doctor's prescription. They should only be used under the advice of a doctor. Illegal sale or possession of antibiotics are offences under the Antibiotics Ordinance (Cap. 137) and the maximum penalty is a $30,000 fine and one year's imprisonment for each offence.

Under the Import and Export Ordinance (Cap. 60), pharmaceutical products must be imported or exported under and in accordance with an import or export licence issued under the Import and Export Ordinance. Illegal import or export of pharmaceutical products are offences under the Import and Export Ordinance (Cap. 60) and the maximum penalty is a fine of $500,000 and 2 years' imprisonment.

All registered pharmaceutical products should carry a Hong Kong registration number on the package in the format of "HK-XXXXX". The products mentioned in the above incidents were not registered pharmaceutical products under the Ordinance in Hong Kong. Their safety, quality and efficacy cannot be guaranteed. Members of the public were exhorted not to use products of unknown or doubtful composition. They should stop using the aforementioned products immediately if they had them in their possession and to consult healthcare professionals if they felt unwell after taking the products. The products should be destroyed or disposed properly, or submitted to the Department's Drug Office during office hours.

Update on Drug Office's website: You can now search the newly registered medicines in the past year at http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk/eps/drug/newsNRM60/en/healthcare_providers?pageNoRequested=1.
Details of ALL registered pharmaceutical products can still be found in the Drug Office website at http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk/eps/do/en/healthcare_providers/news_informations/reListRPP_index.html.

Useful Contact

Drug Complaint:

Tel: 2572 2068
Fax: 3904 1224
E-mail: pharmgeneral@dh.gov.hk

Adverse Drug Reaction (ADR) Reporting:

Tel: 2319 2920
Fax: 2319 6319
E-mail: adr@dh.gov.hk
Link: http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk/adr.html
Post: ***Undesirable Medical Advertisements and Adverse Drug Reaction Unit,***
Drug Office, Department of Health,
Suites 2002-05, 20/F, AIA Kowloon Tower,
Landmark East, 100 How Ming Street,
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The purpose of Drug News is to provide healthcare professionals with a summary of local and overseas drug safety news released. Healthcare professionals are advised to keep update with the information and provide corresponding advice or therapeutic measure to patients and public.