Drug News
藥 物 情 報

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This is a monthly digest of local and overseas drug safety news released by the Drug Office of the Department of Health in December 2024 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

Canada: Summary Safety Review: Cyclosporine: Assessing the potential risk of hearing impairment

On 19 December 2024, Health Canada announced that it reviewed the potential risk of hearing impairment with the use of cyclosporine (cyclosporin A). The safety review was triggered by a labelling update for cyclosporine-containing products by the European Medicines Agency.

Cyclosporine is a prescription drug authorized for sale in Canada for the prevention and treatment of rejection after an organ or bone marrow transplant, the prevention and treatment of graft-versus-host-disease (a complication of bone marrow transplantation) and the treatment of certain autoimmune diseases.

Health Canada reviewed the available information provided by manufacturers, and from searches of the Canada Vigilance database, international databases and the scientific literature. Health Canada reviewed 2 international cases of hearing impairment in patients taking cyclosporine that were reported in the scientific literature. Both cases were found to be possibly linked to the use of cyclosporine. However, the cases reviewed provided limited evidence for a definitive link due to study limitations and other contributing factors that may have resulted in hearing impairment.

Health Canada also reviewed 11 articles published in the scientific literature. Overall, the scientific literature provided insufficient evidence to support a link between cyclosporine and hearing impairment in the post-market setting due to conflicting study findings, limitations in study design, and the underlying conditions of patients that may have contributed to the risk.

Health Canada's review of the available information did not find sufficient evidence in the post-market setting regarding the link between cyclosporine and the risk of hearing impairment to support changes to the Canadian product monograph.

In Hong Kong, there are 11 registered pharmaceutical products for human use containing cyclosporine in oral and injectable forms. All products are prescription-only medicines. As of the end of December 2024, with regard to cyclosporine, the Department of Health (DH) had received 71 cases of adverse drug reaction, but these cases were not related to hearing impairment. The DH will remain vigilant on safety update of the drug issued by other overseas drug regulatory authorities.

Canada: Summary Safety Review: Dasatinib: Assessing the potential risk of delayed growth in children

On 19 December 2024, Health Canada announced that it reviewed the potential risk of delayed growth in children with the use of dasatinib. The safety review was triggered by a labelling update for Sprycel (dasatinib) by the European Medicines Agency. Dasatinib is not authorized in Canada for use in pediatric patients, but data derived from Canadian sources indicate that it has been prescribed off-label in this population. Sprycel is authorized for use in pediatric patients in the United States and Europe.

Dasatinib is a prescription drug belonging to a class of drugs called BCR-ABL tyrosine kinase inhibitors that is authorized for sale in Canada to treat adults with certain types of leukemia (cancer in the blood and bone marrow).

Health Canada reviewed the available information provided by the manufacturers, and from searches

of the Canada Vigilance database and the published literature. Health Canada reviewed 19 cases (1 Canadian and 18 international) of delayed growth in pediatric patients taking dasatinib. Of the 19 cases, 6 (1 Canadian) were published in the literature. Although confounders (other factors that may have contributed to the occurrence of delayed growth) were present, the evidence reviewed suggests dasatinib treatment could result in delayed growth.

Health Canada also reviewed 2 clinical study reports submitted by the manufacturer for Sprycel and 4 articles published in the scientific literature. Collectively, the findings from these studies suggest dasatinib treatment could result in delayed growth in pediatric patients. However, there were study limitations, including the presence of confounders and, in some studies, small sample sizes.

While the cases and studies reviewed had a number of weaknesses, overall, the evidence reviewed was sufficient to support a possible link between the use of dasatinib and the risk of delayed growth in children.

Health Canada's review of the available information found a possible link between the use of dasatinib and the risk of delayed growth in children. Health Canada will work with the manufacturers to update the Canadian product monograph of all dasatinib-containing products to include the risk of delayed growth in children.

In Hong Kong, there are 20 registered pharmaceutical products containing dasatinib. All products are prescription-only medicines. As of the end of December 2024, with regard to dasatinib, the Department of Health (DH) had received 8 cases of adverse drug reaction, but these cases were not related to delayed growth in children. Three of the registered products are indicated for use in pediatrics and safety information on the risk of growth retardation in pediatric patients has already been included in their package inserts. The risk of growth retardation in pediatrics associated with the use of dasatinib is also documented in overseas reputable drug references such as the "British National Formulary for Children" and "American Hospital Formulary Service Drug Information". The DH will remain vigilant on safety update of the drug issued by other overseas drug regulatory authorities.

Canada: Summary Safety Review: Ilaris (canakinumab): Assessing the potential risk of drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms

On 19 December 2024, Health Canada announced that it reviewed the potential risk of drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms (DRESS) with the use of Ilaris (canakinumab). The safety review was triggered by a labelling update by the European Medicines Agency and Health Canada's subsequent review of routine safety reports from the manufacturer of Ilaris.

Ilaris is a prescription drug belonging to a class of drugs called interleukin-1 (IL-1) inhibitors. It is authorized for sale in Canada for the treatment of various inflammatory conditions, including Still's disease, a rare type of inflammatory arthritis occurring in children as systemic juvenile idiopathic arthritis (sJIA) and in adults as adult-onset Still's disease.

Health Canada reviewed the available information provided by the manufacturer, and from searches of the Canada Vigilance database and the scientific literature. Health Canada reviewed 27 cases (1 Canadian and 26 international) of DRESS in patients taking Ilaris. Of those 27 cases, 4 were found to be possibly linked to the use of Ilaris, 5 (1 Canadian) were unlikely to be linked and 18 could not be assessed due to missing information. The 4 possible cases were reported in pediatric patients, 3 of whom were being treated for sJIA. One death was reported among the 4 possible cases. It is unclear whether DRESS was a contributing factor to the death.

Health Canada's review of the available information concluded that there is a possible link between the use of Ilaris and the risk of DRESS. Health Canada is working with the manufacturer to update the Canadian product monograph for Ilaris with a warning about reported cases of DRESS, predominantly in patients with sJIA. Health Canada will also inform healthcare professionals about this update through a Health Product InfoWatch communication.

In Hong Kong, there is one registered pharmaceutical product containing canakinumab, namely Ilaris Solution For Injection 150mg/ml (HK-65635). The product is registered by Novartis Pharmaceuticals (HK) Limited. It is a prescription-only medicine. As of the end of

December 2024, the Department of Health (DH) had not received any case of adverse drug reaction with regard to canakinumab. In light of the above Health Canada's announcement, the DH issued letters to inform local healthcare professionals to draw their attention on 20 December 2024, and the matter will be discussed by the Registration Committee of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board.

Singapore: Potential risk of psychiatric withdrawal events with domperidone for stimulation of lactation

On 30 December 2024, Health Sciences Authority (HSA) announced a safety alert on the potential risk of psychiatric withdrawal events with domperidone for stimulation of lactation.

Domperidone is a selective dopamine receptor antagonist approved locally for the treatment of delayed gastric emptying, gastro-oesophageal reflux, oesophagitis, and nausea and vomiting. The approved recommended dose for adults is 30 mg/day, which can be increased to a maximum of 40 mg/day. The maximum treatment duration generally ranges from one to four weeks depending on the indication but may be extended upon re-assessment of the patient's need for continued treatment.

Domperidone has also been used off-label to promote lactation when deemed medically necessary by doctors. The prescribed dose and duration of treatment is based on the assessment of the individual patient's situation. Domperidone-containing products have been registered in Singapore since 1989 and there are currently nine products registered.

A small number of cases of psychiatric adverse events following sudden discontinuation or tapering of domperidone for stimulation of lactation have been reported overseas. These included nine cases identified by Health Canada and six cases by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These cases reported various adverse events such as agitation, anxiety, confusion, depression and insomnia. In most of these cases, the patients had been taking daily doses greater than 30mg and for longer than four weeks prior to the sudden discontinuation or tapering attempt.

It should be noted that the number of cases is small, and the onset of psychiatric symptoms could be independently associated with the cessation of breastfeeding or the emotional distress resulting from lactation difficulties, rather than being directly linked to domperidone discontinuation. These limit the assessment of a causal relationship between domperidone withdrawal and the reported psychiatric events. Nevertheless, there is a biological plausibility for the association. One postulated mechanism involves the abrupt decrease in plasma prolactin levels, which follows prolonged hyperprolactinaemia induced by long-term domperidone treatment. This could produce a sudden rise in dopaminergic activity and precipitate dopamine-mediated psychiatric events. Another hypothesis is that the higher doses of domperidone used for stimulation of lactation may result in significant penetration of the blood-brain-barrier, which is not generally associated with on-label doses.

As at 31 October 2024, HSA has not received any local adverse event report of psychiatric withdrawal events following domperidone use in stimulation of lactation from healthcare professionals. However, there was one medically unverified report from a consumer who reported that she experienced psychiatric events (including anxiety and depression) upon discontinuation of domperidone prescribed after delivery to help with breastfeeding. The dose and duration of domperidone prescribed was not provided and it was noted that she had a medical history of depression before pregnancy.

Healthcare professionals may wish to consider the above information in their management of patients prescribed with domperidone for stimulation of lactation.

In Hong Kong, there are 42 registered pharmaceutical products containing domperidone. All products are prescription-only medicines. As of the end of December 2024, with regard to domperidone, the Department of Health (DH) had received one case of adverse drug reaction, but this case was not related to psychiatric withdrawal events. In light of the above HSA's announcement, the DH issued letters to inform local healthcare professionals to draw their attention on 31 December 2024, and the DH will remain vigilant on safety update of the drug issued by other overseas drug regulatory authorities.

Drug Recall

Batch Recall of Chlortralim Eye Ointment 1%

On 2 December 2024, the Department of Health (DH) endorsed a licensed drug wholesaler, namely Atlantic Pharmaceutical Limited (Atlantic Pharmaceutical), to recall a batch (batch number: 234012) of Chlortralim Eye Ointment 1% (HK-06476) from the market due to potential quality issue.

The DH received notification from Atlantic Pharmaceutical on 2 December 2024 that the overseas manufacturer of the product is recalling the above batch due to presence of sediments in some units of the affected batch. As a precautionary measure, Atlantic Pharmaceutical is voluntarily recalling the above batch from the market.

The above product is a prescription only medicine, containing antibiotic chlortetracycline hydrochloride. It is indicated for the treatment of eye infections. According to Atlantic Pharmaceutical, the affected batch of product has been imported into Hong Kong and supplied to Hospital Authority, private doctors and pharmacies.

As of the end of December 2024, the DH had not received any adverse reaction reports in connection with the above batch of product. A notice was posted in the Drug Office website on 2 December 2024 to alert the public of the product recall. The DH will closely monitor the recall.

Drug Incident

DH urges public not to buy or consume product called MINTS Plus+ with undeclared controlled drug ingredient

On 12 December 2024, the Department of Health (DH) urged the public not to buy or consume a product called MINTS Plus+, packaged as a candy, as it was found to contain an undeclared controlled drug ingredient. Improper use can pose serious health risks, especially to patients with heart problems.

Acting upon a public complaint, the DH obtained a sample of the product via an online social media platform for analysis. The test results from the Government Laboratory revealed that the sample contained tadalafil, which is a Part 1 poison under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138) (the Ordinance). The product is not a registered pharmaceutical product in Hong Kong and cannot be sold in the market. The test results also revealed that the level of tadalafil in the sample exceeded its usual daily dose.

The DH is continuing to investigate the incident.

Tadalafil is a prescription drug used for treatment of erectile dysfunction, and should only be used under a doctor's advice and be supplied in a pharmacy under the supervision of a registered pharmacist upon a doctor's prescription. Side effects of tadalafil include low blood pressure, headache, vomiting, dizziness and transient vision disturbances. It may interact with some drugs (such as nitroglycerin for treatment of angina) and cause a decrease in blood pressure to dangerous levels. Improper use of tadalafil can pose serious health risks, especially for patients with heart problems.

A press release was posted in the Drug Office website on 12 December 2024 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 $50,000 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/

Useful Contact

Drug Complaint:

Tel: 2572 2068

Fax: 3904 1224

E-mail: pharmgeneral@dh.gov.hk

Adverse Drug Reaction (ADR) Reporting:

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Link: http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk/adr.html

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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.