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(IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE THIS FILE REF.)

13 Jul 2026

Dear Healthcare Professionals,

Desogestrel- and etonogestrel-containing medicines: risk of meningioma and new measures to minimise this risk

Your attention is drawn to the following European Medicines Agency (EMA)'s announcement that its Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC) agreed on a direct healthcare professional communication to inform healthcare professionals about a small increased risk of meningioma associated with current, prolonged use (>1 year) of desogestrel- or etonogestrel-containing contraceptives medicines. Although the risk is increased in people using these medicines, the overall likelihood of developing meningioma remains very low and one additional meningioma is estimated to occur for every 67,300 women who use the medicines. Meningiomas are tumours of the tissue layer surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Usually they are benign (non-cancerous) and grow slowly but, depending on the size or location, they can cause serious problems.

Use of desogestrel- or etonogestrel-containing medicines is now contraindicated in women who have a meningioma or have had one in the past. Women receiving these medicines should be monitored for signs and symptoms suggestive of meningioma, including changes in vision, hearing loss or ringing in the ears, loss of smell, worsening headaches, memory loss, seizures or weakness in arms and legs.

PRAC issued these recommendations following the review of data from a large French epidemiological study. This study found a small increased risk of intracranial meningioma in women using desogestrel for one year or more, with the risk increasing with longer duration of use. In addition, the risk may be higher in women who previously used progestogens already associated with meningioma (for example cyproterone, nomegestrol, medroxyprogesterone, and chlormadinone). Previous progestogen use should therefore be considered before starting desogestrel or etonogestrel.

If a woman using desogestrel or etonogestrel is diagnosed with meningioma, use of the medicine must be discontinued.

Desogestrel and etonogestrel are progestogens used for contraception. In the European Union (EU), desogestrel-containing medicines are available as oral tablets, while etonogestrel-containing medicines are available as implants or, in combination with ethinylestradiol, as vaginal rings. The product information in the EU for these medicines will be updated to include meningioma as a side effect with a frequency "not known", together with new contraindications and warnings.

Please refer to the following website in EMA for details:
https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/meeting-highlights-pharmacovigilance-risk-assessment-committee-prac-6-9-july-2026

In Hong Kong, there are 4 registered pharmaceutical products containing desogestrel, and the products are over-the-counter medicines. There is 1 registered pharmaceutical product containing etonogestrel, and is a prescription-only medicine. So far, the Department of Health (DH) has received 1 case of adverse drug reaction report with regard to desogestrel-containing products, but the case was not related to meningioma, while no adverse drug reaction report with regard to etonogestrel-containing products had been received. In light of the above EMA's announcement, the matter will be discussed by the Registration Committee of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong.

Please note that this letter serves as a means for the DH to communicate important new safety information about registered pharmaceutical products with healthcare professionals in Hong Kong and is not intended to serve as guidelines or to replace professional clinical judgement. Healthcare professionals are advised to balance the risk of possible adverse effects against the benefit of treatment.

Please report any adverse events caused by drugs to the Clinical Trials and Pharmacovigilance Unit of the DH (tel. no.: 2319 2920, fax: 2319 6319 or email: adr@dh.gov.hk). For details, please refer to the website at Drug Office under "ADR Reporting": http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk/adr.html. You may wish to visit the Drug Office's website for subscription and browsing of "Drug News" which is a monthly digest of drug safety news and information issued by Drug Office.

Yours faithfully,

(Clive CHAN)
for Assistant Director (Drug)