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PRAC confirms that modified-release paracetamol should be suspended from market

Overdose complex and difficult to manage with modified-release products

The European Medicines Agency's experts in medicines safety have confirmed their recommendation that modified- or prolonged-release paracetamol products (designed to release paracetamol slowly over a longer period than the usual immediate-release products) should be suspended from marketing.

This follows a re-examination of the previous recommendation that was made in September 2017 following a review by EMA's Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC). The re-examination was requested by two companies marketing modified-release paracetamol or modified-release paracetamol with tramadol.

Having done so, and taken additional advice from experts in the field of pain management and treatment of overdose, the PRAC was still of the opinion that the advantages of having a longer-acting product did not outweigh the disadvantages if an overdose of the medicine were taken, since the usual treatment procedures developed for immediate-release products are not appropriate for modified-release paracetamol. In many cases, it may not be known whether an overdose of paracetamol involves immediate-release or modified-release products, making it difficult to decide what type of management is needed.

The Committee confirmed in its re-examination that it could not identify practical means to minimise the risk to patients, or a feasible and standardised way to adapt the management of paracetamol overdose across the EU to allow for treatment of cases that involve modified-release preparations.

The Committee therefore still recommended that marketing of modified-release paracetamol medicines should be suspended. Immediate-release paracetamol products, which are not affected by this review, will continue to be available as before.

As the medicines involved are all authorised by national procedures, the PRAC recommendations will now be sent to the CMDh[1] for its considerations.

When used appropriately and in recommended doses the benefits of paracetamol outweigh its risks. It remains important that patients seek medical advice quickly if they have taken, or think they may

[1] The CMDh is a medicines regulatory body representing the European Union (EU) Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

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have taken, more than the recommended amount of any paracetamol-containing product. Patients should also consult a healthcare professional if they have any other concerns about their medication.

More about the medicine

Paracetamol is a medicine that has been widely used for many years to relieve pain and fever in adults and children. Paracetamol-containing immediate-release products have been authorised in all EU Member States but are not included in this review.

Products covered by this review contain paracetamol for modified-release and are intended to be taken by mouth and have a longer action. They are available in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, and Sweden under various names including Alvedon 665 mg, Panadol Artro, Panadol Extend, Panadol Retard 8 hours, Panodil 665 mg, Paratabs Retard and Pinex Retard. Modified-release medicines containing paracetamol with the opioid painkiller tramadol are available under the names Diliban Retard or Doreta SR in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain, and these medicines are also covered by this review.

More about the procedure

The review of modified-release paracetamol was initiated on 30 June 2016 at the request of Sweden, under Article 31 of Directive 2001/83/EC.

The review was carried out by the Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC), the Committee responsible for the evaluation of safety issues for human medicines, which has made a set of recommendations in September 2017. Following a request from companies involved in the review, the PRAC re-examined and confirmed its previous recommendation.

The PRAC's final recommendations will now be sent to Co-ordination Group for Mutual Recognition and Decentralised Procedures – Human (CMDh), which will adopt a position. The CMDh is a body representing EU Member States as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. It is responsible for ensuring harmonised safety standards for medicines authorised via national procedures across the EU.