Department of Health & Social Care

NHS

Supply Disruption Alert

SDA/2019/012 Issued: 23 December 2019 Valid until: 30 April 2020

Convulex® (Valproic acid) 150mg, 300mg and 500mg capsules – Supply Disruption Alert

Summary

- The following presentations of Convulex® (valproic acid) capsules are likely to be out of stock until April 2020:
  - Convulex® 150mg capsules – anticipated out of stock week commencing 30th December 2019
  - Convulex® 300mg capsules – anticipated out of stock week commencing 10th February 2020
  - Convulex® 500mg capsules – currently out of stock.

Action

All healthcare professionals in primary, secondary or specialist healthcare services who prescribe and supply valproic acid capsules should work together to:

- ensure that specialist neurology teams support colleagues in primary care if further advice is required;
- take the opportunity this shortage offers to consider, with specialist input and where feasible, changing patients to a different antiepileptic drug (AED) other than valproic acid or sodium valproate;
- consider prescribing unlicensed Convulex® capsules where changing to a different AED is not appropriate *(these are interchangeable to the licensed version, so require no dosing adjustments);*
- consider switching patients to the following if unlicensed Convulex® capsules, or changing patients to a different antiepileptic drug (AED) other than valproic acid or sodium valproate, are not considered appropriate or feasible:
  - sodium valproate preparations (*these have a one to one dose relationship with valproic acid (Convulex®) capsules, so require no dosing adjustments);*
  - alternative valproic acid tablets (Depakote® tablets or Belvo® tablets) *(use of these products in epilepsy is considered 'off-label' although they are interchangeable to the licensed version, so require no dosing adjustments);*
- ensure patients understand that although there is a small risk of breakthrough seizures when switching between valproic acid and sodium valproate preparations, it is less than the risk of abrupt discontinuation of the drug altogether; and
- make sure all female patients who continue treatment containing valproate are enrolled in the pregnancy prevention programme (PPP)

Deadlines for actions

Actions initiated: 24 December 2019
Actions completed: 30 April 2020

Product details

Convulex® (valproic acid) 150mg 300mg and 500mg capsules

Background

There is a supply issue affecting all strengths of Convulex® (valproic acid) capsules due to a pack size update (switching from 100 to 30 capsules), which has led to a delay of the next supply until April 2020.

Convulex® is the only valproic acid product licensed for the treatment of generalised, partial or other epilepsy in children and adults. Alternative valproic acid preparations are licensed for manic episodes in bipolar when lithium is contraindicated or not tolerated.

Advice on switching patients and alternative products

Unlicensed imports of Convulex® (valproic acid) are available from specialist unlicensed importers.

- Any decision to prescribe an unlicensed medicine must consider the relevant guidance and local governance procedures. Please see the links below for further information:
  - Prescribing unlicensed medicines, General Medical Council (GMC),
  - The supply of unlicensed medicinal products, Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
  - Professional Guidance for the Procurement and Supply of Specials, Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS)
- When prescribing a product that is not licensed in the UK, prescribers must indicate on the FP10 prescription that an unlicensed product is required. This can be done by annotating the prescription with the following wording: "**special order**".

Valproic acid is classified by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) as a class 2 antiepileptic, which means that the need for continued supply of a particular manufacturer's product should be based on clinical judgement and consultation with patient and/or carer, taking into account factors such as seizure frequency and treatment history, as well as patient/carer-related factors (negative perceptions about alternative products) and/or other issues related to the patient.

Valproate is available in the UK in three forms: sodium valproate, valproic acid and semi-sodium valproate. Both semi-sodium valproate and sodium valproate are metabolised to valproic acid, which is responsible for the pharmacological activity of all three preparations. The risk of switching between valproic acid and sodium valproate preparations is low, and less than the risk of abrupt discontinuation of the drug altogether. Patients should be advised that there is a small risk of breakthrough seizures and that if these occur, they should contact their GP or specialist'.

Alternative products include:

Sodium valproate
Valproic acid (Convulex®) capsules have a one to one dose relationship with products containing sodium valproate, so requires no dosing adjustments.

- Sodium valproate tablets (100mg – Epilim crushable®)
- Sodium valproate gastro-resistant tablets* (200 and 500mg – Epilim®). Also available as a non-branded (generic) product
- Sodium valproate modified-release tablets (200, 300 and 500mg – Epival CR®, Epilim Chrono®)
- Sodium valproate modified-release capsules (150 and 300mg – Episenta®)
- Sodium valproate oral solution* (200mg/5ml – Epilim®)
- Sodium valproate modified-release granules (50, 100, 250, 500, 750 and 1000mg – Epilim Chronosphere®)

Valproic acid tablets (unlicensed for the treatment of generalised, partial or other epilepsy in children and adults)
Valproic acid tablets are interchangeable, so requires no dosing adjustments, however not all alternative preparations are available in the same strength as Convulex® capsules.

- Belvo® 250mg gastro-resistant tablets
- Belvo® 500mg gastro-resistant tablets
- Depakote® 250mg gastro-resistant tablets
- Depakote® 500mg gastro-resistant tablets

Please refer to the SPC of the selected product to make sure the correct dose frequency is prescribed. Patients should be counselled on use of the new product to ensure they take the correct dose and to report any problems with side effects or seizure control after the switch.

Pregnancy Prevention Programme (PPP)

Valproate must not be used in any woman or girl able to have children unless there is a pregnancy prevention programme (PPP) in place. This is designed to make sure patients are fully aware of the risks and the need to avoid becoming pregnant.

These regulatory measures, announced following a large-scale review of the risk in 2018, also include a ban on the use of valproate for migraine or bipolar disorder during pregnancy, and a ban on the use of valproate to treat epilepsy during pregnancy unless there is no other effective treatment available.

Healthcare professionals who seek to prescribe valproate to their female patients must make sure they are enrolled in the PPP. This includes the completion of a signed risk acknowledgement form when their treatment is reviewed by a specialist, at least annually.

Further information is available via: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/valproate-use-by-women-and-girls

Distribution

If you are responsible for cascading these alerts in your organisation, these are our suggested distribution lists.

Trusts (NHS boards in Scotland)

CAS and SABS (NI) liaison officers for onward distribution to all relevant staff including:

- A&E consultants
- A&E departments
- A&E nurses
- Chief pharmacists
- Clinical governance leads
- Clinical Procurement Specialists [NEW]
- Community hospitals
- Community nurses
- District nurses
- Hospital at home units
- Hospital pharmacies
- Hospital pharmacists
- Medical directors
- Outpatient clinics
- Paramedics
- Pharmaceutical advisors
- Pharmacists

NHS England area teams

CAS liaison officers for onward distribution to all relevant staff including:

- Community pharmacists
- General practitioners
- General practice managers
- General practice nurses

Independent distribution

Establishments registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (England only)

- Adult placement
- Care homes providing nursing care (adults)
- Care homes providing personal care (adults)
- Clinics
- Hospices
- Hospitals in the independent sector
- Independent treatment centres
- Nursing agencies
- Private medical practitioners

Please note: CQC and OFSTED do not distribute these alerts. Independent healthcare providers and social care providers can sign up to receive Supply Disruption Alerts directly from the Department of Health's Central Alerting System (CAS) by sending an email to: safetyalerts@mhra.gov.uk and requesting this facility.

Enquiries

England
Send enquiries about this notice to the DHSC Supply Resilience Team, quoting reference number SDA**/2019/012**

Email: supplyresiliencemd@dhsc.gov.uk