



Consumers Can Help Prevent Harmful Medication Incidents

SafeMedicationUse.ca Newsletter

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Biologics and Biosimilars: What You Need to Know

Biologic medications (also known as “biologics”) and biosimilar medications (also called “biosimilars”) are used to treat many diseases, including Crohn disease, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, and some cancers. Biologics are made from living cells and can be very expensive to produce. Much like the generic versions of conventional medications, biosimilars are “near copies” that do the same job as the corresponding biologic medications, but they are typically more affordable.

A biologic and its matching biosimilars will have the same common name, but the brand names will be different. For any medication that you are taking, including biologics and biosimilars, it is important to know both the common name and the brand name, to avoid confusion when you are discussing the specific medication with a health care provider.

For example, the medication etanercept (common name) is available as Enbrel (biologic brand name) and as Brenzys and Erelzi (biosimilar brand names). A patient who is talking to a health care provider or reporting side effects or mistakes would need to use both the common name and the brand name, according to the brand that the patient is taking: “etanercept Enbrel” or “etanercept Brenzys” or “etanercept Erelzi”. Using both names will help to avoid confusion about which specific product is being taken.

SafeMedicationUse.ca recognizes that this naming system may be confusing for consumers and for health care providers. The following suggestions are presented for consumers who are taking biologic medications:

- Get to know both names of your medication: the common name and the brand name. You can write these names on your medication list, or take a picture of the package or label with your mobile phone. This will help make sure that you continue to receive the exact biosimilar or biologic medication that you’ve been taking.
- Be sure to use **both** the common name and the brand name when you are sharing information about your biologic or biosimilar medication. This is particularly important when you are talking to different health care providers or you are reporting side effects or mistakes with the medication. Using both names will help to avoid confusion about the specific product you are taking.
- Use the “[5 Questions to Ask about Your Medications](#)” to get the information you need to understand all of your medications.

Health Canada is interested in tracking side effects and other problems with biologics and biosimilars:

- Report any side effects to the [Canada Vigilance Program](#). This can be done [online](#), by phone at 1-866-234-2345 (toll-free), or by fax or mail using the [Side Effect Reporting Form](#). Reports from consumers help to make sure important information is gathered and shared.

Report any mistakes with your biologic or biosimilar to the SafeMedicationUse.ca online [Incident Reporting Program](#), or call 1-866-544-7672.

Medication safety bulletins contribute to Global Patient Safety Alerts.

This newsletter was developed in collaboration with Best Medicines Coalition and Patients for Patient Safety Canada.

Recommendations are shared with healthcare providers, through the ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin, so that changes can be made together.

This newsletter shares information about safe medication practices, is noncommercial, and is therefore exempt from Canadian anti-spam legislation.