



The College of Emergency Medicine

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Dear Colleagues,

Paracetamol overdose: new guidance on the use of intravenous acetylcysteine

The College Clinical Effectiveness Committee (CEC) has been working closely with the Medicines & Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) following a review by the Commission on Human Medicines of the treatment of paracetamol poisoning. Professor Simon Thomas chaired the implementation group, with input from the National Poisons Information Service (NPIS).

The key changes from previous guidance are:

- A single treatment line regardless of hepatotoxicity risk (see Annex I, below).
- The duration of administration of the first dose of intravenous acetylcysteine is increased from 15 minutes to 1 hour.
- Removal of hypersensitivity as a contraindication to treatment with acetylcysteine.
- Provision of weight-based dosing tables for adults and children.
- A Technical Information Leaflet (TIL) which gives more detailed instructions on the preparation of acetylcysteine infusions (see Annex II, below).

These changes are intended to simplify treatment decisions, minimise allergic reactions and reduce prescribing errors. They reflect the findings of the Commission on Human Medicines that risk factor assessment was difficult and inconsistently applied in clinical practice. There have also been many reports of prescribing and administration errors.

This new guidance will be published in the next edition of the British National Formulary (BNF). We would therefore recommend that you introduce these changes as soon as possible, and cascade this information to all clinical staff in your Emergency Department.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Stephen Nash
Chair, Standards and Audit Subcommittee

Professor Jonathan Benger
Chair, Clinical Effectiveness Committee

Further details regarding the CHM recommendations can be found on the MHRA website <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/Safetyinformation/Safetywarningsalertsandrecalls/Safetywarningandsandmessagesformedicines/CON178225>

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