



Safety Notice 004/18

Morphine sulfate injection 5 mg/1 mL shortage and risk of error

21 February 2018

Distributed to:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Director Regulation & Compliance Unit

Action required by:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance

We recommend you also inform:

- Heads of departments
- Directors of Medical Services
- Directors of Pharmacy
- Directors of Nursing and Midwifery
- Drug and Therapeutics Committee

Expert Reference Group

Content reviewed by:

- Office of the Chief Health Officer, MoH
- Chief Pharmacists Unit, MoH
- HealthShare NSW
- Medication Safety Expert Advisory Committee

Clinical Excellence Commission

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<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/v.au/sabs>

Intranet Website
<http://internal.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs/>

Review date

May 2018

Background

A disruption to the supply of DBL morphine sulfate injection 5 mg/1 mL ampoules has occurred. Supply is anticipated to return to normal at the end of March 2018. Morphine sulfate injection 10 mg/1 mL and morphine sulfate injection 15 mg/1 mL are available from wholesalers.

Morphine is an opioid analgesic used for moderate to severe pain unresponsive to non-opioids. Adverse effects include drowsiness and respiratory depression. Morphine is a high risk medicine; refer to the [NSW High-Risk Medicines Management Policy](#) (PD2015_029) for relevant Standards relating to its use.

Implications

To manage the disruption to supply, morphine sulfate injection **10 mg/1 mL** should be used.

There is a risk of medication error due to the higher concentration of this product, particularly when used in clinical settings by staff who are accustomed to using the 5 mg/1 mL ampoule. Morphine sulfate injection 10 mg/1 mL is twice the concentration of morphine sulfate injection 5 mg/1 mL and if the same volume was administered inadvertently, a twofold dosage error would occur.

To reduce risk of error, **the dose of morphine should always be prescribed in mg, not mL.**

Suggested actions by Local Health Districts/Networks

1. Distribute this notice to relevant staff at each facility to identify whether morphine sulphate injection 5 mg/1 mL is stocked.
2. If morphine sulphate 5 mg/mL injection is stocked, all facilities should:
 - a) Assess the current status of morphine sulfate injection 5 mg/1 mL preparations available in each facility, ensuring location of all stock is identified.
 - b) Plan and implement strategies to manage the substitution at a local level by the Drug and Therapeutics/Medication Safety Committee.
 - c) Ensure a system is in place to document actions taken.
 - d) On return of stock of morphine sulfate 5 mg/mL injection, remove stock of morphine sulphate 10 mg/mL injection where it is not normally kept.
3. Report any incidents associated with use of morphine into the Incident Information Management System (IIMS).