

May 2018

Patient information

Shortage of diamorphine for NHS patients

What is diamorphine used to treat?

Diamorphine is licensed to treat severe pain associated with surgery, heart attack or a terminal illness. It is also used for the relief of shortness of breath in severe heart conditions. In addition, a small number of people in the UK may be receiving diamorphine to manage heroin addiction.

Who could be affected by the shortfall in the supply of diamorphine?

People taking diamorphine could include those undergoing major surgery in hospital, patients being treated for a heart attack or other serious heart conditions, people who are terminally ill and receiving end of life care. There are also some people being treated in the community for heroin addiction, who take diamorphine.

Patients who are prescribed higher strength doses of diamorphine, 30mg, 100mg and 500mg are not affected as there is adequate supply for these doses.

Why is there a shortage of this drug?

There are two manufacturers who make the drug, diamorphine. One of the main suppliers, a company called Accord, has experienced a manufacturing issue at the site where the lower strength, 5mg and 10mg dosages are produced. The other supplier, Wockhardt, is unable to produce extra stocks of the drug at short notice, however the Department of Health and Social Care is working with them to see how quickly they can produce more of the drug.

Is there an alternative drug that I can take?

A similar alternative to diamorphine is morphine and many patients may be prescribed this in the short term, however the dose of morphine you may take will be different to diamorphine. Your doctor or pharmacist will discuss this with you before switching to morphine.

What should I do if I currently take diamorphine?

Continue to take your medication as your doctor or pharmacist has advised you to. When you need a new prescription or repeat prescription your doctor or pharmacist will talk to you about whether you will be prescribed a similar drug. If you are prescribed morphine you will be closely monitored by your healthcare professional or support worker.

What is the NHS is doing to ensure there are enough supplies of diamorphine for all patients who need it?

NHS England, the Department of Health and Social Care, clinical experts and partners from across the health service are working together with the manufacturers of diamorphine to ensure there are adequate supplies of the drug for NHS patients. We are also working closely with our partners at the Medicines Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and NHS Improvement.

Where can I find more information?

If you have any concerns about your medication please speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

If you need medical help urgently, and it's not life threatening, please call **NHS 111**. This is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and calls are free from landlines and mobiles.