

Information about changes to medicines or treatments on the NHS: **Changes to immediate-release fentanyl prescribing**

The NHS will be asking doctors to stop or greatly reduce the prescribing of some medicines from December 2017. This is because the medicines are:

- Not as safe as other medicines OR
- Not as good (effective) as other medicines OR
- More expensive than other medicines that do the same thing.

One of these medicines is immediate-release fentanyl.

This document will explain why the changes are happening and where you can get more information and support.

What is fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a strong painkiller. It is available as an immediate-release painkiller in various dosage forms: tablets, lozenges, films and nasal spray. “Immediate-release” means that it acts very quickly, and it is sometimes used for the treatment of “breakthrough” pain in adults with cancer who are already receiving other, longer-acting strong painkillers.

It is also used for other types of pain, but it does not have a licence* for these and can be addictive.

*Having a licence means that a medicine has passed tests to ensure that it is effective, safe and manufactured to appropriate quality standards.

Why does the NHS want to reduce prescribing of immediate-release fentanyl?

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) says that immediate-release fentanyl should not be the first choice for “breakthrough” pain in adults with cancer – it should only be used if other options haven’t worked. This is likely to be for just a small number of people.

Also, the amount of immediate-release fentanyl being prescribed nationally makes it likely that in many cases it is being used for other types of pain than cancer. Immediate-release fentanyl can cause addiction, so we want to reduce use in these cases.

This **does not** apply to slow-release versions of fentanyl, which come in patch form. Fentanyl patches will still be available on prescription.

Will my immediate-release fentanyl be stopped?

If you are taking immediate-release fentanyl for cancer pain it will not be stopped.

If you are taking immediate-release fentanyl for other types of pain it will be reviewed by your doctor. You may be supported to stop taking immediate-release fentanyl and offered a different painkiller if needed.

Where can I find more information and support?

- You can speak to your local pharmacist, GP or the person who prescribed the medication to you
- National and local charities can offer advice and support, for example:
 - Pain Concern: 0300 123 0789 <http://painconcern.org.uk/>
 - Pain UK: <https://painuk.org>
 - Cancer Research: www.cancerresearchuk.org/
 - MacMillan: www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/pain
- The NICE information for patients can be found at: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg140/ifp/chapter/About-this-information
- The Patients Association can also offer support and advice: www.patients-association.org.uk/ or call 020 8423 8999

Find out more about the medicines that are being stopped or reduced:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/medicines/items-which-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed/>

Find out more about licensed and unlicensed medicines:

<https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/off-label-or-unlicensed-use-of-medicines-prescribers-responsibilities#a-licensed-medicine-meets-acceptable-standards-of-efficacy-safety-and-quality>

If you have any questions about fentanyl prescribing please email them to: england.medicines@nhs.net