SFDA
Safety communication

13/06/2024

Potential Risk of Intrahepatic Cholestasis of Pregnancy (ICP) Associated with the Use of Thiopurines.

The Saudi Food and Drug Authority (SFDA) would like to notify healthcare professionals about the potential risk of intrahepatic cholestasis of pregnancy (ICP) associated with the use of thiopurine, in pregnant patients. The current registered thiopurines in Saudi Arabia include: azathioprine (IMURAN®), and mercaptopurine (PURINETHOL® and XALUPRINE®).

Azathioprine, often combined with corticosteroids and other immunosuppressants, is used to enhance the survival of renal, cardiac, and hepatic transplants and to lower corticosteroid needs in renal transplant recipients. It's also indicated for moderate to severe inflammatory bowel disease [IBD, (Crohn's disease (CD) or ulcerative colitis (UC)] in patients who require corticosteroids, cannot tolerate them, or whose disease resists other treatments. In addition, azathioprine is indicated for severe rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), dermatomyositis, polymyositis, autoimmune chronic active hepatitis, pemphigus vulgaris, polyarteritis nodosa, autoimmune hemolytic anemia, and chronic refractory idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura. Mercaptopurine is indicated for acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), and acute promyelocytic leukaemia (APL)/acute myeloid leukaemia M3 (AML M3)).

Thiopurines are currently labeled for risk of hepatotoxicity and fetal harm with use during pregnancy, and should not be given to patients who are pregnant or likely to become pregnant in the near future without careful assessment of risks versus benefit. Globally, post-marketing cases of ICP have been reported in women treated with thiopurine drugs for CD, UC or SLE during pregnancy.

Based on the current evidence, the SFDA will request updating to the product information of thiopurine containing products to include a warning about the risk of ICP during pregnancy.

In addition, the SFDA advises healthcare professionals to closely monitor pregnant patients using thiopurines and educate patients to seek a medical help if they develop signs and symptoms of ICP such as itching, dark urine and pale stools.

Call for reporting:

The SFDA urges both healthcare professionals and patients to report ADRs related to use of any medication to the SFDA using the following contact information:

The National Pharmacovigilance Centre (NPC):

Call Center: 19999

Website: https://ade.sfda.gov.sa

SFDA RMM Webpage: