

ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin Supplement

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New Learning from an Analysis of Incidents Related to Paxlovid

Paxlovid consists of co-packaged nirmatrelvir and ritonavir tablets and is approved for the treatment of mild to moderate COVID-19 in adults at high risk for progression to severe disease.¹ Shortly after product launch, a safety bulletin published in February 2022 shared learning from an analysis of incident reports.² A recent analysis of 74 reports (submitted to the Canadian Medication Incident Reporting and Prevention System* between January 2022 and July 2025) was conducted, and new learning is shared here.

NEW LEARNING

THEME: Drug Interaction Management

The management of drug interactions is a critical aspect of the safe use of Paxlovid, given that ritonavir is known to interact with many medications. The analysis demonstrated a need for careful clinical assessment and management of interactions.

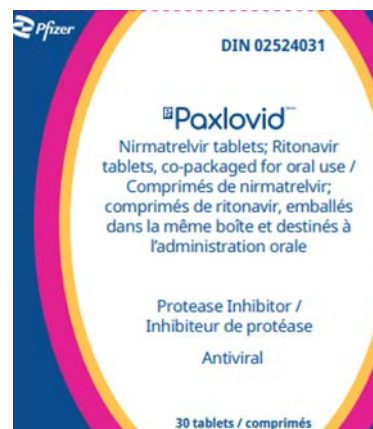


Image provided by Pfizer Canada

Incident example: A patient with adrenal insufficiency was started on Paxlovid. The patient was advised to reduce their usual hydrocortisone dose because of a possible interaction between hydrocortisone and Paxlovid. However, in the context of a viral illness, this patient required higher doses of hydrocortisone to prevent adrenal crisis. This situation demonstrates the need for individualized assessment.

THEME: Prescription Transfer Communication

Many community pharmacies maintain limited on-hand Paxlovid inventory due to the high carrying cost. As such, for timely initiation, Paxlovid prescriptions are often transferred to another pharmacy. The analysis identified opportunities to improve the prescription transfer process and communications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider each patient's individual situation when assessing drug interactions, including what condition is being treated by each medication. Reach out to specialists for guidance if needed.
- Ensure that patient/caregiver engagement includes a plan with instructions to hold/reduce interacting medications and when to resume them. Some pharmacies have instituted a follow-up call program to ensure that previous medications/doses are resumed.
- When receiving a Paxlovid prescription transfer, request information from the transferring pharmacy about the patient's renal function and their other medication use to enable assessment of the clinical appropriateness of the prescription.

References available from <https://ismpcanada.ca/bulletin/incidents-paxlovid>

* Components of the Canadian Medication Incident Reporting and Prevention System are ISMP Canada's Consumer Reporting program, Individual Practitioner Reporting database, and National Incident Data Repository for Community Pharmacies (NIDR), as well as the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) National System for Incident Reporting (NSIR).