

HALTON REGION HEALTH DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH
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TO: Halton Physicians

Medical Chiefs of Staff: Joseph Brant Hospital, Halton Healthcare (Oakville, Milton and Georgetown Hospitals)
Chairs of: Family Practice, Paediatrics, Internal Medicine, Emergency, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Surgery
Chief of Laboratory Services and Infection Control Practitioners
Halton Midwives

POST IN: Emergency Department and Physicians Lounge

FROM: Dr. Hamidah Meghani, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: June 19, 2019

RE: Gentian violet safety alert related to potential cancer risk

Health Canada has issued a warning identifying potential cancer risk related to gentian violet exposure. This product has been used to treat skin infections (thrush/yeast), and as an antibacterial dye in external foam wound dressings.

Health Canada warns that oral exposure to gentian violet has been shown to cause cancer in animal studies, although there have been no reported cases of cancer in humans related to gentian violet exposure.

Gentian violet topical

Topical gentian violet is used as a skin treatment, and on mucous membranes inside the nose, mouth, and vagina. Topical gentian violet is commonly used to treat infant thrush and nipple candidiasis. When the product is applied to the nipple of the mother's breast and/or inside the infant's mouth, it may be ingested by the infant.

Gentiane Violet Liquid Topical (gentian violet) is the only licensed, non-prescription product containing gentian violet marketed in Canada, according to Health Canada. The manufacturer of Gentiane Violet Liquid Topical voluntarily discontinued their product after being notified of the results of the risk assessment by Health Canada in May 2019. It is no longer available for purchase in Canada and its product drug licence has been cancelled. It is possible your patients may still be able to purchase gentian violet online.

Health Canada advises consumers to stop using any products containing gentian violet, including on animals. Products used for humans can be returned to local pharmacies for proper disposal.

Gentian violet in foam wound dressings

Hydrofera Antibacterial Foam external wound dressings contain gentian violet. Due to the structure and composition of the product, the user experiences little or no gentian violet exposure resulting in a lower risk of cancer.

Hydrofera foam wound dressings containing gentian violet continue to be available in Canada. However, there is limited clinical data to support the safety and effectiveness of these products for pregnant and breastfeeding women so they are not recommended for this population. Health Canada is working with the manufacturer to improve safety messaging on these products.

Further details are available from Health Canada:

Health Canada safety alert: <https://healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2019/70179a-eng.php>

Health Canada safety review summary: <https://hpr-rps.hres.ca/reg-content/summary-safety-review-detail.php?lang=en&linkID=SSR00224>

Please report all suspected or confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) (formerly Reportable Diseases) to the Halton Region Health Department as soon as possible. Diseases marked * should be reported immediately by telephone (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or fax (Mon-Fri, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm only). Other diseases can be reported the next working day. Call 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866. For general information, please visit halton.ca.

If any link provided in this memo does not work, please cut and paste it into your web browser.