



# Medicine Supply Notification

Reference: MSN/2020/004

Azathioprine 25mg tablets

Tier 2

Date of issue: 16/01/2020

## Summary

- All suppliers of azathioprine 25mg tablets are out of stock until the w/c 27<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, azathioprine 50mg tablets remain available.

## Actions Required

For patients who do not have sufficient supplies of azathioprine 25mg tablets until the resupply date, clinicians are requested to consider one of the following options;

- halving azathioprine 50mg tablets (see advice below on additional counselling required for halving tablets); or
- prescribing 50mg azathioprine tablets and changing the patient's dosage regimen to alternate days (e.g. a dose of 125mg daily can be prescribed as 100mg and 150mg on alternate days); or
- prescribing azathioprine 50mg/5ml oral suspension (unlicensed special)

Pharmacists and prescribers are requested to discuss all treatment options with patients to identify the most appropriate option for the individual patient and ensure appropriate training / counselling has been provided on any changes to their treatment regimen.

## Supporting Information

### Halving azathioprine 50mg tablets

- The halving of azathioprine 50mg tablets to equate a 25mg dose is considered unlicensed. Due to the mutagenic and potentially carcinogenic nature of azathioprine tablets, when handling this substance appropriate precautions must be taken when halving azathioprine 50mg tablets. Pharmacists should consider halving tablets on behalf of patients if deemed appropriate. If it is decided that halving tablets is the best option, then the following precautions should be taken by the individual halving the tablets (including patients who should be counselled accordingly);
  - a tablet cutter **must** be used,
  - direct contact with hands should be avoided. Patients are advised to handle tablets with rubber gloves or tweezers,
  - surplus medicinal products and or/ contaminated pill cutters should be stored in clearly labelled containers and separated from other devices,
  - any unused/ surplus medicinal products should be discarded into a sealed container and returned to pharmacies for safe destruction
  - a work surface should be used that is separate from areas used to prepare food (surfaces should be cleaned immediately after)
  - women who are pregnant, at risk of pregnancy or breast feeding are advised to avoid handling tablets,
  - in the event of tablets coming into direct contact with skin, patients are required to wash their hands immediately after.
  - further advice on handling cytotoxic agents is available [here](#).

### **Alternative day dosing regimen**

- If prescribers/pharmacists deem alternating patient's dosage regimens appropriate. Healthcare professionals should be confident of patients understanding dosing quantities. If there are concerns adjusting the dosage regimen, specialist teams should be contacted for further advice

### **Unlicensed azathioprine 50mg/5ml oral suspension**

An unlicensed special of azathioprine 50mg/5ml oral suspension is available from BCM Specials and Rosemont Pharmaceuticals. Please be advised, there may be other companies that can also supply this formulation.

- Any decision to prescribe an unlicensed medicine must consider the relevant guidance and/or local governance procedures. Please see the links below for further information.
  - [Prescribing unlicensed medicines](#), General Medical Council (GMC),
  - [The supply of unlicensed medicinal products](#), Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
  - [Professional Guidance for the Procurement and Supply of Specials](#), Royal Pharmaceutical Society

## **Enquiries**

If you have any queries, please contact [DHSCmedicinesupplyteam@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:DHSCmedicinesupplyteam@dhsc.gov.uk)