



EUROPEAN MEDICINES AGENCY
SCIENCE MEDICINES HEALTH

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Start of review of valproate and related substances

The European Medicines Agency has started a review of valproate and related substances and their use in pregnant women.

Valproate medicines are used for treating epilepsy and bipolar disorder. It has been known for some time that using anti-epileptic medicines in pregnant women increases the risk of birth defects in their children and that valproate medicines may be associated with a higher risk of certain birth defects than other anti-epileptic medicines. It has also been known that development may be delayed in children born to women who were treated with valproate medicines during pregnancy. The product information for valproate medicines in the EU contains information on their use during pregnancy.

The review of valproate medicines has been requested by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) following the publication of new studies suggesting that in some children problems in development, which can include autism, may be long-lasting. The MHRA also noted that there was a need to update the product information of these medicines to bring them in line with current evidence.

The European Medicines Agency will now review the available data on the benefits and risks of valproate and related substances and issue an opinion on the use of these medicines in pregnant women.

More about the medicine

Valproate and related medicines have been used in the EU since the 1960s to treat epilepsy and bipolar disorder. Some valproate medicines are also used in some EU Member States to prevent migraine headaches.

The exact way valproate works is not well understood, but it is thought to act by increasing the amount of a neurotransmitter (a substance that relays signals between nerve cells) called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which may act as a mood stabiliser. Valproate may also work by preventing the passage of electrically charged sodium particles through tiny pores in the surface of cells, which has the effect of reducing excessive electrical activity in the brain.

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Valproate and related medicines have been authorised via national procedures in all EU Member States, and in Norway and Iceland, and are marketed under various name including Absenor, Convival Chrono, Convulex, Convulsofin Tabletten, Delepsine, Depakine, Deprakine, Diplexil, Dipromal, Epilim, Episenta, Epival, Ergenyl, Espa-Valept, Hexaquin, Leptilan, Micropakine L.P., Orfiril, Orlept, Petilin, Valberg, Valepil and Valhel.

More about the procedure

The review of valproate and related substances has been initiated at the request of the UK, under Article 31 of Directive 2001/83/EC.

The review is being carried out by the Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC), the Committee responsible for the evaluation of safety issues for human medicines, which will make a set of recommendations. As medicines containing valproate and related substances are all authorised nationally, the PRAC recommendation will be forwarded to the Co-ordination Group for Mutual Recognition and Decentralised Procedures – Human (CMDh), which will adopt a final position. The CMDh, a body representing EU Member States, is responsible for ensuring harmonised safety standards for medicines authorised via national procedures across the EU.