



ISMP's List of *High-Alert Medications*

High-alert medications are drugs that bear a heightened risk of causing significant patient harm when they are used in error. Although mistakes may or may not be more common with these drugs, the consequences of an error with these medications are clearly more devastating to patients. We hope you will use this list to determine which medications require special safeguards to reduce the risk of errors.

This may include strategies like limiting access to these medications, using auxiliary labels and automated alerts, standardizing the ordering, preparation, and administration of these products, and employing automated or independent double checks when necessary. (Note: manual independent double checks are not always the optimal error reduction strategy and may not be practical for all of the medications on the list).

Classes/Categories of Medications
adrenergic agonists, IV (e.g., epinephrine)
adrenergic antagonists, IV (e.g., propranolol)
anesthetic agents, general, inhaled and IV (e.g., propofol)
cardioplegic solutions
chemotherapeutic agents, parenteral and oral
dextrose, hypertonic, 20% or greater
dialysis solutions, peritoneal and hemodialysis
epidural or intrathecal medications
glycoprotein IIb/IIIa inhibitors (e.g., eptifibatide)
hypoglycemics, oral
inotropic medications, IV (e.g., digoxin, milrinone)
liposomal forms of drugs (e.g., liposomal amphotericin B)
moderate sedation agents, IV (e.g., midazolam)
moderate sedation agents, oral, for children (e.g., chloral hydrate)
narcotics/opiates, IV and oral (including liquid concentrates, immediate- and sustained-release formulations)
neuromuscular blocking agents (e.g., succinylcholine)
radiocontrast agents, IV
thrombolytics/fibrinolytics, IV (e.g., tenecteplase)
total parenteral nutrition solutions

Specific Medications
amiodarone, IV
colchicine injection
heparin, low molecular weight, injection
heparin, unfractionated, IV
insulin, subcutaneous and IV
lidocaine, IV
magnesium sulfate injection
methotrexate, oral, non-oncologic use
nesiritide
nitroprusside sodium for injection
potassium chloride for injection concentrate
potassium phosphates injection
sodium chloride injection, hypertonic (more than 0.9% concentration)
warfarin

Background

Based on error reports submitted to the USP-ISMP Medication Errors Reporting Program and reports of harmful errors in the literature, ISMP created a list of potential high-alert medications. During August and September, 2003, more than 350 practitioners responded to an ISMP survey designed to identify which of these medications were most frequently considered high alert by individuals and organizations. Further, to assure relevance and completeness, the clinical staff at ISMP, members of our advisory board, and safety experts throughout the US were asked to review the potential list. This list of drugs and drug categories reflects the collective thinking of all who provided input.

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