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Pharmacy News, Updates and Reminders

Valsartan Recall. On Friday, July 13, the Food and Drug Administration [announced a recall](#) of several products containing valsartan, an angiotensin receptor blocker (ARB) commonly used to treat hypertension and heart failure. This recall is based on the inclusion of an impurity, N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA), a probable carcinogen, during production of the tablets of several generic valsartan manufacturers. While the recall affects both valsartan and valsartan/hydrochlorothiazide combination products, Entresto (sacubitril/valsartan, indicated for use in systolic heart failure) is NOT included in the recall.

Though the recall does not pertain to all known manufacturers of the product, it may lead to a shortage and therefore impact patients' therapy. To assist providers in the event that a switch in medication is required, the following chart may be used when considering other ARBs if needed. Important – these may not be clinically equivalent dosing conversions in all cases. These are based upon FDA-approved dosing ranges and comparative doses from clinical trials used in the treatment of hypertension, when such trials are available. Please consider individual patient characteristics and clinical variables in the application of these recommendations. All products have options that include hydrochlorothiazide 12.5mg or 25mg, if needed.

Agent		"Equivalent" Daily Doses in HTN			"Equivalent" Daily Doses in HF		
Generic	Brand	Lower dose	Intermediate dose	Upper dose	Lower dose	Intermediate dose	Upper dose
Candesartan	Atacand®	4 -8 mg	8-16 mg*	16-32mg*	4mg	8-24mg	32mg
Irbesartan	Avapro®	75 mg	150mg	300mg			
Losartan	Cozaar®	25-50mg	50-100mg*	100mg*	50mg	100mg	150mg
Olmesartan	Benicar®	10mg	20mg	30-40mg			
Telmisartan	Micardis®	20mg	40mg	80mg			
Valsartan	Diovan®	40-80 mg	80-160 mg	320mg	80mg*	120-280mg*	320mg*

* May need to be given in divided doses twice daily. In heart failure, valsartan was studied given in divided doses twice daily; candesartan and losartan were studied given once daily. [\(back to top\)](#)

LCPN P&T Decision: Generic AirDuo (fluticasone/salmeterol) is the **preferred combination long-acting beta-agonist (LABA) / inhaled corticosteroid (ICS) inhaler**, when covered favorably by insurance. A detailed LCPN Pharmacy Fact Sheet is located [at this link](#). Generic fluticasone/salmeterol is not an approved generic version of Advair, and therefore is not interchangeable at the time of pharmacy dispensing. **Providers must indicate the generic product specifically when e-prescribing.** This is an opportunity to switch patients from higher-cost branded products to the low-cost generic because the cost difference to LCPN is significant: generic fluticasone/salmeterol is about \$300 less expensive per month-supply vs. Advair, and \$150-\$200 less expensive vs. other branded LABA/ICS combination inhalers. When converting patients to the generic, it is also an opportunity to assess adherence and overall asthma control, and the [Asthma Control Test](#) may be used to assist providers identify patients who may need to be seen for further assessment. See the chart below for comparative dosing and coverage compared to Advair. Though not indicated for use in patients with COPD, generic fluticasone/salmeterol may be an option for Medicare patients in the Medicare part D donut hole, or those who do not have pharmacy coverage. *Please note:* As of this writing, generic fluticasone/salmeterol is not covered by the Lahey Health medication formulary, since the employee plan formulary is different from what is usually offered under Harvard Pilgrim Health Care.

Dosing for fluticasone/salmeterol combination inhaler products

ICS/LABA Combination Product	Low Dose	Medium Dose	High Dose	Avg Cost per Inhaler**	Coverage*
fluticasone/salmeterol Respiclick (generic AirDuo)	55 mcg/14 mcg one inhalation twice daily	113 mcg/14 mcg one inhalation twice daily	232 mcg/14 mcg one inhalation twice daily	~ \$80 (generic)	BCBS = Tier 2 HPHC = Tier 1 Tufts = Tier 1
Advair Diskus fluticasone/salmeterol	100 mcg/50 mcg one inhalation twice daily	250 mcg/50 mcg one inhalation twice daily*	500 mcg/50 mcg one inhalation twice daily	\$255-\$415	BCBS = Tier 3 HPHC = Tier 2 Tufts = Tier 2
Advair HFA fluticasone/salmeterol	45 mcg/21 mcg two inhalations twice daily	115 mcg/21 mcg two inhalations twice daily	230 mcg/21 mcg two inhalations twice daily	\$285-\$455	

*Generic AirDuo is not universally covered as of the date of publication (6/18/2018), though most major commercial cover it on a lower tier vs. brand-name inhaled combinations. It is not preferred / not covered by MassHealth and many Medicare D plans. Coverage information is accurate as of the date of publication.

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Generic Viagra... Update. Reminder: Prescribe sildenafil 20 mg tablets (generic Revatio) in place of brand-name PDE-5 inhibitors or generic Viagra for erectile dysfunction.

Background: Earlier this year, the LCPN Pharmacy & Therapeutics Committee recommended the use of sildenafil 20 mg in place of Viagra brand name. Since then, the interchangeable generic form of Viagra has reached the market. However, even though sildenafil 25 mg, 50 mg and 100 mg tablets are interchangeable for the brand-name Viagra, **sildenafil 20 mg is significantly less expensive for the patient and for the organization.** See below for a price comparison. Shifting patients to paying cash for sildenafil 20 mg instead of filling the interchangeable generics with their pharmacy benefit can save LCPN several hundred thousand dollars annually. Use [this patient handout](#) to assist patients with selecting a pharmacy.

Medication	Strength	# of doses	# of tablets	Cost for Patient per month supply	Financial Impact to LCPN per month supply
Viagra	25mg, 50mg, 100mg tablets	4	4	Tier 3 copayment or not covered (\$60 for many plans to over \$250 cash)	\$170-\$200
Sildenafil (generic Viagra)	25mg, 50mg, 100mg tablets	4	4	Tier 1 or 2 copayment (\$10 to \$40 for many plans)	\$135-\$150
Sildenafil (generic Revatio)	20 mg tablets	6-30	30	CASH* = \$20 to \$30	\$0
Cialis	2.5mg, 5mg, 10mg, 20mg tablets	4	4	Tier 2 or 3 copayment (\$40 to \$60+ for many plans)	\$225 (2.5mg = \$340)
Levitra	10mg, 20mg	4	4	Tier 3 copayment or not covered (\$60 for many plans to over \$250 cash)	\$155-\$170

*Encourage the patient to shop around, and emphasize they should not use their insurance card

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