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EMA recommends refusal of authorisation for Ibuprofen NVT (ibuprofen, 400 mg, soft capsules)

On 22 February 2024, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) completed a review of Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg soft capsules following a disagreement among EU Member States regarding its authorisation. The Agency concluded that the benefits of Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg do not outweigh its risks and the marketing authorisation granted in Lithuania cannot be recognised in Spain, where the company had applied for a marketing authorisation.

In addition, the marketing authorisations in Lithuania and other Member States where the medicine is authorised (Estonia, France, Latvia, Poland and Romania) should be suspended.

What is Ibuprofen NVT?

Ibuprofen NVT is a painkiller and anti-inflammatory medicine that belongs to the class of medicines called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

The active substance in Ibuprofen NVT, ibuprofen, works by blocking an enzyme called cyclo-oxygenase, which produces prostaglandins, substances that are involved in the inflammation process. By reducing the production of prostaglandins, Ibuprofen NVT is expected to reduce fever and pain linked to inflammation.

Ibuprofen NVT is a generic medicine. This means that Ibuprofen NVT was developed to contain the same active substance and work in the same way as a 'reference medicine' already authorised in the EU. The reference medicine is Nurofen Rapid 400 mg soft capsules.

Why was Ibuprofen NVT reviewed?

The applicant, Laboratorios Liconsa S.A., requested that the marketing authorisation for Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg granted in Lithuania (the 'reference Member State') on 8 June 2022 be recognised in Spain (the 'concerned Member State').

However, the Member States were not able to reach an agreement and the Lithuanian medicines agency referred the matter to EMA for arbitration on 17 November 2023.

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The grounds for the referral were concerns raised by the Spanish medicines agency, which considered that Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg was not bioequivalent to the reference medicine. Two medicines are considered bioequivalent if the active substances from both medicines are absorbed in the body at the same rate and to the same extent.

The Spanish agency had concerns about the average time it takes for the active substance to reach its maximum level (known as median T_{max}), as this measure was higher with Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg than with the reference medicine. Based on this, the Spanish agency had concerns that Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg may not have the same effect as the reference medicine.

What is the outcome of the review?

For two medicines to be considered bioequivalent, all the bioequivalence criteria defined in EU guidance must be met. For Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg, the company submitted data from a bioequivalence study and data from scientific literature.

After reviewing the available data, EMA concluded that, although other bioequivalence criteria had been met, the median T_{max} for Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg was not comparable with that of the reference medicine. Therefore bioequivalence of Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg to the reference medicine had not been shown.

The Agency concluded that the benefits of Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg do not outweigh its risks and recommended that the marketing authorisation should not be granted in Spain. In addition, until all criteria for bioequivalence have been met, marketing authorisations for Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg in Lithuania, Estonia, France, Latvia, Poland and Romania should be suspended.

More about the procedure

The review of Ibuprofen NVT 400 mg was initiated on 17 November 2023 at the request of Lithuania under Article 29(4) of Directive 2001/83/EC.

The review was carried out by EMA's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP), responsible for questions concerning medicines for human use.

The European Commission issued an EU-wide legally binding decision on the marketing authorisation of Ibuprofen NVT on 10 May 2024.