

# Generic imatinib

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**You will notice that there has been a change in the brand of imatinib that you receive. The information below will answer any questions you may have about this change.**

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## **What's happening with imatinib for gastrointestinal stromal tumours (GIST)?**

In early 2021, the patent protection on the original brand of imatinib (Glivec®) for GIST came to an end. When the patent for a drug runs out, other pharmaceutical companies can make their own copy of the drug– these are referred to as 'generic' medicines. There is now a version of generic imatinib available in the UK which is licensed for GIST. We need to ensure we use NHS resources efficiently, so we will be switching patients who are currently receiving Glivec® to the generic version of the medicine. The NHS always tries to use generic drugs and this is normal for many health conditions. Generic imatinib of the same composition and quality as Glivec® is now available, and the NHS will move towards using generic imatinib for all patients with GIST.

## **What is a generic medicine?**

A generic medicine is identical to a brand name drug in dosage form, effectiveness, safety, strength, route of administration and quality. Although generic drugs are chemically identical to their branded counterparts, they typically cost much less than the branded price. Use of generic medicines – for example, antibiotics, painkillers, heart medicines and cancer medicines is very common in the NHS. Using generic medications allows the NHS to make considerable savings, which can be used to improve healthcare for all of us.

## **How can I be sure of the quality of generic imatinib?**

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA – <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/medicines-and-healthcare-products-regulatory-agency>) is the authority that regulates the use of medicines across the UK. Health professionals and patients can be assured that MHRA-approved generic medicines have met the same standards as the original drug.

## **To gain MHRA approval, a generic medicine must:**

- contain the same active ingredients as the original drug (inactive ingredients may vary);
- be identical in strength, dosage form, and route of administration;
- be bioequivalent;
- meet the same batch requirements for identity, strength, purity, and quality; and
- be manufactured under the same strict standards of good manufacturing practice regulations required for the original product.

Evidence indicates that generic imatinib is as effective and has the same side effect profile as Glivec®. Generic imatinib has been used in the UK for over 4 years without problems for a haematological cancer.

There is some useful information from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) about generic medicines here: [www.ema.europa.eu/docs/en\\_GB/document\\_library/Medicine\\_QA/2009/11/WC500012382.pdf](http://www.ema.europa.eu/docs/en_GB/document_library/Medicine_QA/2009/11/WC500012382.pdf)

### **What does this mean to me?**

The generic medicine we are switching you to will contain the same active product, imatinib. You will continue getting the same amount of imatinib at the same time intervals. The treatment for your condition remains unchanged; we will monitor your disease activity as normal but do not have plans to have any additional monitoring in place.

### **What if I experience problems after switching to generic imatinib?**

We do not expect any patients to experience any problems as a result of switching. However, if after the switch you do experience problems, then you can discuss this with your oncology specialist nurse or specialist doctor. Occasionally, some patients may experience some minor side effects when they take a new formulation of a drug. If these are problematic, then you should discuss this with the specialist team looking after you.

### **I'm already on Glivec® (the Novartis brand of imatinib); will I be switched to generic imatinib?**

Yes, the whole of the NHS will switch over to generic imatinib. Although the timelines between different hospitals may vary, the plan across the NHS is to switch all patients on Glivec® to generic imatinib. Your pills and the packaging containing them might look different but you can be assured that generic imatinib will work just as well as Glivec®.

### **Will I still be able to access other drugs if imatinib doesn't work for me?**

Yes, your oncologist will discuss other treatment options as and when required.

### **What should I do if I want more information or I have concerns?**

If you have any further concerns, please contact your oncologist or specialist nurse.

### **Summary**

- Generic versions of many drugs are used routinely in the NHS without problems.
- If you are currently taking Glivec® for GIST, you will be switched to a generic brand of imatinib in 2021.
- All generic brands of imatinib in the UK have been carefully reviewed and approved by the MHRA for their quality and safety.
- You can be assured that any of the available generic brands of imatinib will be just as good as Glivec®.

## How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, or need further information on your medication, please contact:

Your oncology team via hospital switchboard: 0118 322 5111

OR

Medicine Information Patient Helpline: 0118 322 7642 (Mon-Fri 1pm-3pm) or via email [medicines.information@royalberkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:medicines.information@royalberkshire.nhs.uk) and a member of the oncology pharmacy team will be in contact with you.

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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