

The Medical Letter[®]

on Drugs and Therapeutics

Volume 62

November 2, 2020

ISSUE No.
1610

IN THIS ISSUE

In Brief: New Benzodiazepine Warningsp 175

Important Copyright Message

FORWARDING OR COPYING IS A VIOLATION OF U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL COPYRIGHT LAWS

The Medical Letter, Inc. publications are protected by U.S. and international copyright laws. Forwarding, copying or any distribution of this material is prohibited.

Sharing a password with a non-subscriber or otherwise making the contents of this site available to third parties is strictly prohibited.

By accessing and reading the attached content I agree to comply with U.S. and international copyright laws and these terms and conditions of The Medical Letter, Inc.

For further information click: [Subscriptions](#), [Site Licenses](#), [Reprints](#)
or call customer service at: 800-211-2769

The Medical Letter®

on Drugs and Therapeutics

Volume 62 (Issue 1610)

November 2, 2020

Take CME Exams

IN BRIEF

New Benzodiazepine Warnings

The FDA now requires boxed warnings in the package inserts of benzodiazepines describing the potential for these drugs to be abused and misused and to cause addiction and physical dependence.¹ Benzodiazepine labels have contained a boxed warning about a risk of serious drug interactions with opioids since 2016.²

Benzodiazepines act by potentiating the effects of the inhibitory neurotransmitter GABA in the CNS. Although their abuse potential is less than that of opioids, they are often misused concurrently with opioids and alcohol, which can markedly increase the risk of overdose and death. Patients with a history of drug or alcohol abuse are more likely to develop a benzodiazepine use disorder. Abrupt withdrawal of benzodiazepines after chronic use can result in serious, potentially life-threatening adverse effects such as seizures. Benzodiazepines are classified by the DEA as schedule IV controlled substances.

Postmarketing data and published literature have shown an increasing rate of benzodiazepine-associated morbidity and mortality over the past decade. In 2016, more emergency department visits in the US were associated with benzodiazepine use than with opioid use (167,845 vs 129,863),³ and in 2018, it was estimated

that 5.4 million Americans ≥ 12 years old had abused or misused benzodiazepines in the previous 12 months.⁴ From 2010 to 2017, annual benzodiazepine-associated deaths in the US increased 8.9-fold to 11,537. Most benzodiazepine-related serious adverse effects and emergency department visits involved concurrent use of other drugs.⁵

Benzodiazepines should be used at the lowest effective dose for the shortest possible duration of time, and patients receiving them should be monitored for substance use disorders. The dose should be tapered gradually when stopping chronic treatment.⁶ ■

1. FDA drug safety communication: FDA requiring Boxed Warning updated to improve safe use of benzodiazepine drug class. September 23, 2020. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3nJJzle>. Accessed October 22, 2020.
2. FDA drug safety communication: FDA warns about serious risks and death when combining opioid pain or cough medicines with benzodiazepines; requires its strongest warning. Available at: <https://bit.ly/33V1pjB>. Accessed October 22, 2020.
3. Al Geller et al. U.S. emergency department visits resulting from non-medical use of pharmaceuticals, 2016. *Am J Prev Med* 2016; 56:639.
4. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2018 NSDUH detailed tables. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3khrqPU>. Accessed October 22, 2020.
5. CDC. National Vital Statistics System: mortality statistics. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3lZgAhQ>. Accessed October 22, 2020.
6. M Soyka. Treatment of benzodiazepine dependence. *N Engl J Med* 2017; 376:1147.

PRESIDENT: Mark Abramowicz, M.D.; **VICE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE EDITOR:** Gianna Zuccotti, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.P., Harvard Medical School
VICE PRESIDENT AND EDITOR IN CHIEF: Jean-Marie Pflomm, Pharm.D.; **ASSOCIATE EDITORS:** Susan M. Daron, Pharm.D., Amy Faucard, MLS, Corinne Z. Morrison, Pharm.D., Michael P. Viscusi, Pharm.D. **CONSULTING EDITORS:** Brinda M. Shah, Pharm.D., F. Peter Swanson, M.D.

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Carl W. Bazil, M.D., Ph.D., Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons; Ericka L. Crouse, Pharm.D., B.C.P.P., C.G.P., F.A.S.H.P., F.A.S.C.P., Virginia Commonwealth University; Vanessa K. Dalton, M.D., M.P.H., University of Michigan Medical School; Eric J. Epstein, M.D., Albert Einstein College of Medicine; David N. Juurlink, BPhM, M.D., Ph.D., Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre; Richard B. Kim, M.D., University of Western Ontario; Franco M. Muggia, M.D., New York University Medical Center; Sandip K. Mukherjee, M.D., F.A.C.C., Yale School of Medicine; Dan M. Roden, M.D., Vanderbilt University School of Medicine; Esperance A.K. Schaefer, M.D., M.P.H., Harvard Medical School; Neal H. Steigbigel, M.D., New York University School of Medicine; Arthur M. F. Yee, M.D., Ph.D., F.A.C.R., Weill Medical College of Cornell University

MANAGING EDITOR AND DIRECTOR OF CONTENT OPERATIONS: Susie Wong; **EDITORIAL ASSISTANT:** Karrie Ferrara

FULFILLMENT AND SYSTEMS MANAGER: Cristine Romatowski; **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SALES:** Elaine Reaney-Tomaselli

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS: Joanne F. Valentino; **INTERIM PUBLISHER:** Jean-Marie Pflomm, Pharm.D.

Founded in 1959 by Arthur Kallet and Harold Aaron, M.D.

Copyright and Disclaimer: The Medical Letter, Inc. is an independent nonprofit organization that provides healthcare professionals with unbiased drug prescribing recommendations. The editorial process used for its publications relies on a review of published and unpublished literature, with an emphasis on controlled clinical trials, and on the opinions of its consultants. The Medical Letter, Inc. does not sell advertising or receive any commercial support. No part of the material may be reproduced or transmitted by any process in whole or in part without prior permission in writing. The editors do not warrant that all the material in this publication is accurate and complete in every respect. The editors shall not be held responsible for any damage resulting from any error, inaccuracy, or omission.

Subscription Services

Address:
The Medical Letter, Inc.
org
145 Huguenot St. Ste. 312
New Rochelle, NY 10801-7537
www.medicalletter.org

Customer Service:
Call: 800-211-2769 or 914-235-0500
Fax: 914-632-1733
E-mail: custserv@medicalletter.org

Permissions:
To reproduce any portion of this issue,
please e-mail your request to:
permissions@medicalletter.org

Subscriptions (US):
1 year - \$159; 2 years - \$298;
3 years - \$398. \$65 per year
for students, interns, residents,
and fellows in the US and Canada.
Reprints - \$45 per issue or article

Site License Inquiries:
E-mail: SubQuote@medicalletter.org.
Call: 800-211-2769
Special rates available for bulk
subscriptions.

Get Connected:  

Copyright 2020. ISSN 1523-2859

