Start of review of valproate sodium and related substances

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Information on Valproate-sodium

Valproate and related substances (valproic acid) have been used in the EU since the 1960s to treat epilepsy and bipolar disorder. Some valproate medicines are also used in some EU Member States to prevent migraine headaches. Not all indications are approved across member states.

The exact way valproate works is not well understood, but it is thought to act by increasing the amount of a neurotransmitter (a substance that relays signals between nerve cells) called gamma-amino butyric acid (GABA), which may act as a mood stabiliser. Valproate may also work by preventing the passage of electrically charged sodium particles through tiny pores in the surface of cells, which has the effect of reducing excessive electrical activity in the brain.

In Malta, the following products containing valproate or valproic acid are authorised for use;

PRODUCT NAME	FORMULATION	LICENSE NUMBER
Epilim 200 Enteric Coated Tablets	GASTRO RESISTANT TABLET	AA082/04311
Epilim 500 Enteric Coated Tablets	GASTRO RESISTANT TABLET	AA082/04312
Epilim Chrono 300 Controlled Release	TABLET, PROLONGED RELEASE	MA082/04301
Epilim Chrono 500 Controlled Release	TABLET, PROLONGED RELEASE	MA082/04302
Epilim Intravenous	POWDER AND SOLVENT FOR SOLUTION FOR INJECTION OR INFUSION	MA082/04303
Epilim Chrono 200 Controlled Release	TABLET, PROLONGED RELEASE	MA082/04310
Epilim Liquid, 200mg/5ml, liquid	ORAL SOLUTION	MA082/04311

Information from European Medicines Agency about the safety concern

Scientific publications tend to suggest that anti-epileptics used in pregnant women increases the risk of birth defects in children and that valproate medicines may be associated with a higher risk of certain birth defects than other anti-epileptic medicines.

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It has also been known that development may be delayed in children born to women who were treated with valproate medicines during pregnancy. The product information for valproate medicines in the EU contains information on their use during pregnancy.

A review of valproate and related substances and their association with birth defects has been triggered at the EMA's Pharmacovigilance Risk Assessment Committee (PRAC), this procedure is currently ongoing and is expected to lead to a harmonisation of safety concerns across all Member states.

Reporting Adverse Drug Reactions

Healthcare professionals and patients are encouraged to maintain vigilance on medicines containing Valproate sodium or related substances. Suspected Adverse Drug Reactions (side effects) may be reported using the Medicines Authority ADR form or online at **http://www.medicinesauthority.gov.mt/adrportal** or to the marketing authorisation holder or their local representatives.

Dr John Joseph Borg
Post-licensing Director

Healthcare professionals and patients are encouraged to regularly check the Medicines Authority website for product safety updates as these are issued on an ongoing basis.

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