

Patient briefing



Notice

25 May 2006

Understanding NPSA advice

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) helps the NHS to provide safer healthcare for everyone. This information is about the advice the NPSA has given the NHS on making sure that morphine and diamorphine injections are used safely.

Ensuring safer practice with morphine and diamorphine injections

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) has received a small number of reports about high dose injections (30mg or more) of morphine and diamorphine causing harm to patients who were being given these medicines for the first time.

A high dose of these medicines can be too much for a patient who has not been given morphine or diamorphine before, and can cause breathing problems, unconsciousness and, in rare cases, be fatal.

The NPSA has issued advice to the NHS on how to ensure that patients are given injections of morphine and diamorphine safely.

Patients who need higher doses of morphine and diamorphine will still receive them and are not affected by the NPSA's recommendations.

If you are given an injection of morphine or diamorphine it is important that you speak to your doctor or nurse immediately if you feel very drowsy or suffer side effects.

Why are patients given morphine or diamorphine?

Morphine and diamorphine belong to a group of medicines called opiates. Patients are given them to treat severe pain, for example after an accident or an operation, or because they have cancer. They are given as tablets, a solution or an injection. This information relates to injections only.

Morphine and diamorphine are pain-relieving drugs but they are very strong and should be treated with caution.

High doses of morphine and diamorphine are generally only used to treat patients who are suffering from conditions which require long-term pain relief and who can tolerate high doses, or patients whose condition is deteriorating or changing rapidly.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of morphine and diamorphine include drowsiness, feeling or being sick, and constipation. If you experience these or any other symptoms that you think may be due to these medicines, you should speak to your doctor or nurse.



NPSA advice to the NHS

The NPSA is advising healthcare staff on how to safely prescribe, handle and give these medicines to patients and how to effectively monitor the clinical effects of them.

About the NPSA

The NPSA promotes safer healthcare by collecting and analysing information about patient safety incidents from staff and patients, and through working with NHS organisations to promote an open and fair culture.

If you would like more information about the NPSA's work, visit our website at:
www.npsa.nhs.uk