



HSE National Patient Safety Alert

Potential risk of underdosing with calcium gluconate in severe hyperkalaemia 003/2023

What does it mean for me as a patient or service user?

About National Patient Safety Alerts

HSE *National Patient Safety Alerts* (NPSA) are high-priority communications about patient safety issues, which require HSE services and HSE funded agencies to take specific action within an identified timeframe. They are developed with relevant people including subject matter experts and patient representatives.

What is hyperkaeleemia?



High potassium (called hyperkalemia) is a medical problem in which you have too much potassium in your blood. Your body needs potassium. It is an important nutrient that is found in many of the foods you eat. Potassium helps your nerves and muscles, including your heart, work the right way. However too much potassium in your blood can be dangerous. It can cause serious heart problems.

(Source: National Kidney Foundation www.kidney.org)

If you have a very high level of potassium in your blood (6.5 mmol per litre or above), you will be treated for severe hyperkalaemia. Certain patients are at higher risk of developing severe hyperkalaemia such as patients being treated for kidney issues and patients receiving emergency treatment for other complex problems. The severe hyperkalaemia will be treated and a calcium salt such as calcium gluconate will be used to protect your heart.

Why was this alert issued?



A similar alert was issued in the UK. Patient safety incident reports from both Ireland and the UK have highlighted medication errors in the administration of calcium gluconate, in particular underdosing (not a high enough dose) of the medicine.

This alert requires healthcare providers to review, and if necessary update local practices and documentation regarding dosage and administration of calcium gluconate for the treatment of severe hyperkalaemia in adults.



What do I have to do?

As a patient you will not need to do anything.

If you are being treated for severe hyperkalemia your healthcare team will have been provided with the correct guidance to take care of you.

If you have any queries or concerns please speak with own local healthcare team.



Where can I get more Information?



For queries on this or any HSE NPSA email patientsafetytogether@hse.ie