



June 19, 2020

Further Update on BAL Shortage 2020

British Anti-Lewisite (BAL) is the only chelator approved by Health Canada for the treatment of acute lead, mercury and arsenic poisonings. The Ontario Poison Centre has become aware that British Anti-Lewisite (BAL) as provided by Akorn is again on back order. As Akorn has filed for bankruptcy, it is unlikely to become available from a pharmaceutical company in North America for some time.

Health Canada – Special Access Program has indicated that they would be willing to consider applications for BAL from other manufacturers if submitted. The name of the manufacturer and contact information must be included in the application.

In light of the fact that the Ontario Poison Centre suggests that every Emergency Department have a chelator in their antidote stocks for these indications, and in light of the fact that supplies may be limited or past expiry, the poison centre recommends that hospital pharmacies keep expired stock for use until new stock is available. Should a patient with acute heavy metal poisoning present to hospital, BAL might potentially be borrowed from surrounding hospitals at that time. As always, chelation for treatment of acute heavy metal poisonings should be started in consultation with the Ontario Poison Centre.

The Poison Centre has also become aware that the US FDA has extended the expiry date of BAL-in-oil, lot 111767A, distributed by Akorn, from end of May 2020 to end of November 2020 as per the website <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-shortages/search-list-extended-use-dates-assist-drug-shortages>

As an alternative, the Ontario Poison Centre, suggests that individual hospital pharmacies or those with antidote sharing agreements procure DMPS (2,3-dimercapto-1-propane sulfite) from Health Canada - Special Access Program (SAP) for "Future Use".

The cost of shipping is quoted as being \$2500. This is for shipping in a controlled temperature environment. According to our colleagues at the IWK Poison Centre who have been using this product since 2012, regular shipping is adequate. Using this method, the cost per vial is quoted as ~\$40 (Canadian dollars)

As BAL is formulated in peanut oil, it would be contraindicated in the setting of peanut allergy. Each hospital should have available for immediate use a chelator that can be given to the encephalopathic (seizing) or vomiting patient consequential to their heavy metal poisoning. DMPS would meet this need and replace BAL in times of shortage as well. Please see materials on the OPC website to assist in one's application for this product.

DMSA (dimercaptosuccinic acid) or Succimer®/Chemet® has also been approved by Health Canada for specific patients through the Special Access Program. This is a valuable chelator for the same indications when the patient is not acutely ill as it can be given orally and may be recommended in the future in consultation with the Poison Centre. Health Canada has not approved DMSA "For Future Use". DMSA cannot act as a substitute for expired or short stocked BAL because of this.

Margaret Thompson, MD, FRCP(C)
Medical Director, Ontario Poison Centre
