

RGH Pharmacy E-Bulletin

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A joint initiative of the Patient Services Section and the Drug and Therapeutics Information Service of the Pharmacy Department, Repatriation General Hospital, Daw Park, South Australia. The RGH Pharmacy E-Bulletin is distributed in electronic format on a weekly basis, and aims to present concise, factual information on issues of current interest in therapeutics, drug safety and cost-effective use of medications.

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Oral famciclovir for herpes labialis

Oral famciclovir has recently been approved in Australia as a treatment to reduce healing time for recurrent herpes labialis (cold sores) in immunocompetent patients. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved famciclovir for the new indication in January 2007; however recent advertising has raised the public's awareness of the new treatment.

Herpes labialis is predominantly (90%) caused by infection with herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1). After initial infection with HSV-1, the virus may be reactivated by physical trauma, stress, illness, sunlight or other unknown factors and produce painful vesicular lesions.

After oral administration famciclovir is converted to penciclovir, a compound with known anti-viral activity against HSV-1 and 2. The TGA's approval of famciclovir for herpes labialis was based primarily on a recent study of 701 adults comparing patient-initiated oral famciclovir with placebo. Patients were required to be immunocompetent, at least 18 years of age and have experienced three or more episodes of herpes labialis in the preceding 12 months. They were also required to have experienced prodromal symptoms preceding their recurrent infections and progress to vesicular lesions at least 50% of the time.

Subjects took either famciclovir 1500mg as a single dose, 750mg twice daily, or placebo (initiated by the patient within one hour of the onset of prodromal symptoms and before the appearance of any lesion). When compared with placebo, the two famciclovir regimens improved time to healing by approximately two days. There was no statistical difference between the two famciclovir regimens, and no statistical difference in adverse effects between any of the treatment arms.

There have been no clinically significant drug interactions reported with famciclovir or penciclovir. Famciclovir is generally well tolerated and the most commonly reported adverse effect when used for the treatment of herpes labialis was headache.

The recommended dosage for recurrent herpes labialis is 1500mg as a single dose or 750mg twice daily. Patients need to be instructed to start treatment at the earliest sign or symptom of a cold sore, such as tingling, itching or burning. As such, patients will need to have the medication on hand to ensure early initiation of therapy.

Penciclovir is renally cleared and dosage modification is recommended for patients with impaired renal function, according to their creatinine clearance:

Estimated GFR (ml/min)	Suggested dosage
40-59	750mg (single daily dose)
20-39	500mg (single daily dose)
10-20	250mg (single daily dose)

Famciclovir (*Famvir*) is presently available on a prescription-only basis, and supply is not subsidised through the pharmaceutical benefits scheme. A pack of three x 500mg tablets on a private prescription will cost approximately \$30.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION – CONTACT THE PHARMACY DEPARTMENT ON 82751763 or email: chris.alderman@rgh.sa.gov.au
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