

## Help Prevent Medication Incidents

A component of the Canadian Medication Incident Reporting and Prevention System (CMIRPS).

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# Alert

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### **Alert: Take Care with Medicine Patches!**

From smoking cessation aids and motion sickness remedies to treatments for dementia and pain, a number of medicines are now available in the form of a patch. Patches provide an alternative to pills, injections, and other forms of medicines and can provide a convenient way to get medicine into your body. They act over extended periods of time (for example, for a day or a week) and each patch can contain a large amount of medicine.

However, medicine patches, like other forms of medicine, can result in serious harm if not used as directed. Recently, the Institute for Safe Medication Practices in the United States shared the story of a 2-year-old boy who was found unconscious 2 days after visiting a relative in a nursing home. He later died, and a patch containing fentanyl, a very strong pain killer, was found in his throat. This tragic event highlights the need for increased public awareness about the safe use of this unique form of medicine. [Read more](http://www.consumermedsafety.org/medication-safety-articles/item/545-mom-hopes-sons-overdose-spurs-prevention-efforts)  
[www.consumermedsafety.org/medication-safety-articles/item/545-mom-hopes-sons-overdose-spurs-prevention-efforts](http://www.consumermedsafety.org/medication-safety-articles/item/545-mom-hopes-sons-overdose-spurs-prevention-efforts).

Here is some advice about using medicine patches safely.

#### **When beginning therapy with a medicine patch:**

- When you are first using a patch, watch closely for symptoms of getting too much or too little of the drug. If you are being switched from another form of the same drug, such as pills, your dose may be adjusted. Ask your healthcare provider for advice on what to look out for. If you notice changes in how you feel, tell your healthcare provider, so that you can help ensure you're getting the right dose.
- Carefully read all the information that the pharmacy provides with your medicine patches. If you have any questions or concerns, ask your pharmacist.
- Be sure to add your medicine patch to your list of medicines. Whenever possible, mention the location on your body where you usually place your patch, since many patches are transparent and difficult to see. Always keep your medicine list up-to-date, and show it to your healthcare provider whenever you receive care.

#### **When applying medicine patches:**

- Always be sure to remove your old patch before applying a new one. Even a used patch may still contain some medicine. Accidentally applying two patches at the same time could cause you to receive an overdose of medicine. Use a calendar or the tools provided in the medicine package to remind you of the location of the patch, the date and time you applied it, and when to change it. If you notice that you have accidentally applied two patches, contact your pharmacist, local poison control centre, or other healthcare provider immediately.
- If your healthcare provider has told you to apply two patches, check carefully to be sure you are applying the correct strengths. Double-check your dose every time you remove old patches and apply new ones.

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### **Making sure your patch stays in place:**

- Check your patch to make sure it's still in place when you get up in the morning, any time you change your clothes, and at regular intervals during the day. There have been reports of patches falling off, sticking to clothing, and even sticking to other people.
- Be sure you know in advance what to do if your patch falls off. Carefully review the information provided with the patch, and ask your pharmacist or healthcare provider for advice. The instructions may be different for different products.
- If your patch falls off, try to determine why it is not sticking properly. For example, patches may not stick well if applied to a hairy part of the body.

### **Special precautions:**

- Never share your medicine patches, and never use a medicine patch that has been prescribed for someone else. For example, applying even a single fentanyl patch can cause death in a person whose body is not used to taking high doses of narcotic pain killers.
- Extra heat can increase the amount of medicine absorbed from a patch and can cause you to receive an overdose of medicine. Therefore, never use a heating pad or hot water bottle on a part of the body that has a medicine patch. Also, avoid exposing the patch to other sources of heat, such as saunas, hot tubs, heat lamps, and prolonged sunbathing.
- Some medicine patches contain a small amount of metal, which may cause problems with a certain type of medical imaging, known as MRI or magnetic resonance imaging. The metal in the patch may cause burns on the skin during MRI procedures. Therefore, if you need to have this type of imaging, tell the MRI technician and other healthcare providers that you are wearing a patch.
- Never apply a damaged patch to your body. Damage to the patch may change how the medicine enters your body. This could cause you to receive the wrong dose.

### **Storing and discarding medicine patches:**

- Children or pets may be tempted to chew a patch. Children may also try to apply a patch like a Band-Aid or sticker. To reduce the possibility of accidents involving children or pets, always keep medicine patches in a safe place, out of their reach.
- Used patches may contain enough medicine to cause serious harm to children, adults, or pets. Therefore, it is important to dispose of patches safely. When you remove a patch, always fold the used patch onto itself (sticky sides together) and immediately dispose of it, making sure that it is kept out of reach of children. Check the directions you receive with your medicine patches on how to dispose of your patches safely. If you are not sure what to do, check with your pharmacist. Some pharmacies have a program for return and disposal of medicines, including used patches.
- Make sure to store your patches under the conditions suggested by the manufacturer. Avoid storing patches for long periods of time in a car or in any area that is directly exposed to heat or sunlight. If you are unsure about how or where to store your supply of patches, check with your pharmacist or healthcare provider.

For more information on keeping a list of medicines and using medicines safely, see our medication [safety tips](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/tips_safepactices.html).  
[http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools\\_resources/tips\\_safepactices.html](http://www.safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/tips_safepactices.html)