



National Prescribing Service Limited



**MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **Safety concerns with asthma drug**

Doctors should be cautious of the increased risk associated with the long-acting asthma drug salmeterol, according to Dr Peter Wark from the Hunter Medical Research Institute, Newcastle, writing in the latest issue of *Australian Prescriber*.

Inhaled corticosteroids remain the first line treatment for asthma in Australia. Long-acting beta<sub>2</sub> agonists are currently recommended as add-on therapy if an appropriate dose of inhaled corticosteroids does not control the patient's asthma.

Long-acting beta<sub>2</sub> agonists, such as salmeterol and eformoterol, are frequently prescribed drugs for asthma in Australia. However, advice by the United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) says that doctors should act with caution when using these drugs due to increased risks of severe asthma episodes, and death when those episodes occur.

"Recent studies have led the US FDA to change the labelling on the drugs to include a warning about the increased risks. This is a significant warning that should encourage all doctors to be especially cautious with long-acting beta<sub>2</sub> agonists," said Dr Wark.

To avoid these problems, long-acting beta agonists should not be used alone to treat asthma. They should always be used with inhaled corticosteroids and patients should all have a clear written asthma action plan to treat a loss of asthma control safely.

Long-acting beta<sub>2</sub> agonists should not be used to treat acute asthma without the associated use of inhaled corticosteroids.

For further information, general practitioners, pharmacists and other health professionals can contact the National Prescribing Service (NPS) Therapeutic Advice and Information Service (TAIS) on 1300 138 677 between 9am and 7pm EST.

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