

Biosimilars Initiative Rituximab

BC PharmaCare coverage is changing for people taking Rituxan®

What is changing?

The Biosimilars Initiative is switching all PharmaCare-covered patients taking Rituxan to the biosimilar brand version of rituximab (Truxima™, Riximyo™, Ruxience™).

During the six-month transition period (see below), PharmaCare will cover the originator and biosimilar brands of rituximab for all currently covered patients. The transition period will provide time for patients to inform themselves and start the switching process with their prescriber. At the end of this transition period, PharmaCare will only cover an approved biosimilar.

August 20, 2020 — February 18, 2021

Drug	Originator	Biosimilar	Conditions Include
rituximab	Rituxan®	Truxima™ Riximyo™* Ruxience™	granulomatosis with polyangiitis microscopic polyangiitis relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis rheumatoid arthritis
Meet with your prescriber by February 18, 2021, to discuss switching to a new version of your medication. As of February 19, 2021, Rituxan will no longer be covered without exceptional request.			
*Note: At this time, Riximyo cannot yet be used to treat microscopic polyangiitis or granulomatosis with polyangiitis.			

Will I be affected?

You will be affected by this change if you:

- currently use Rituxan, and
- receive PharmaCare coverage.

If I switch, will my infusion protocol stay the same?

Rituximab can be infused at different rates, resulting in different durations of infusions. If you have been receiving rituximab at a faster rate than usually recommended for the initial dose(s) of a rituximab biosimilar, it may be recommended that you start on a slower protocol when switching.

What are biologic and biosimilar drugs?

Biologic (originator) drugs are medications made using living organisms (such as yeast or animal cells) to produce complex proteins that affect certain processes in the human body.

Biosimilar drugs are designed to be as safe and effective as the original biologic (originator) drug, and to treat the same chronic conditions. Because the production of biologics is complicated and the molecules themselves are complex, an originator drug and its biosimilar are highly similar but not identical.

To be approved in Canada, a biosimilar must be proven to have no clinically meaningful differences from the originator. Studies must show that there are no differences in outcomes for patients taking the biosimilar compared to those taking the originator drug.

In B.C., the Ministry of Health will be carefully monitoring biosimilar treatments, patient outcomes, and feedback from patients and health practitioners both during and after the Biosimilars Initiative.

“Patients and healthcare providers can have confidence that biosimilars are effective and safe for each of their authorized indications. No differences are expected in efficacy and safety following a change in routine use between a biosimilar and its reference biologic drug in an authorized indication.”

–Health Canada, Biosimilars Fact Sheet

Why is PharmaCare coverage changing?

As new treatments are developed, PharmaCare must review which drugs are covered and carefully consider how to best meet the needs of B.C. residents.

Since biologic drugs were introduced in the 1980s, these treatments have become the biggest drug expense in Canada. As patents on biologic drugs begin to expire, other manufacturers can start producing a highly similar version of the medication, with no clinically meaningful differences in safety and efficacy. These new versions are called biosimilars.

Rituxan is among Canada’s top 10 biologic expenses. Since biosimilars are developed based on previous biologic work and require less research and development, they are less expensive to produce, without compromising efficacy and safety, and offer major savings that can be reinvested into our healthcare system. This in turn supports a healthy and competitive drug market where more manufacturers can produce new, affordable, and accessible drugs for many patients.

How do I maintain my rituximab coverage?

1. Make an appointment with your Rituxan prescriber (i.e., your rheumatologist or neurologist) during the switch period from August 20, 2020—February 18, 2021.
2. Discuss switching to a rituximab biosimilar with your prescriber or pharmacist. (Note: Only your prescriber can write a new prescription.)
3. Your prescriber will explain the switching process, discuss your biosimilar options, write you a new prescription, and register you with a new patient support program.
4. Ensure that you have spoken with your prescriber and initiated your switch to a biosimilar by February 18, 2021.

Where can I get more information?

Visit www.gov.bc.ca/biosimilars for more details on the Biosimilars Initiative, frequently asked questions, and other resources.

Or contact us by:

Email: Biosimilars.Initiative@gov.bc.ca

Phone: 1 844 915-5005 (Mon–Fri, 8:30AM–4:30PM)

PharmaCare recognizes that some patients have exceptional medical requirements that may prevent switching to a biosimilar at this time. Your prescriber will assist you in determining whether it may be medically necessary to request exceptional Special Authority approval for continued coverage of Rituxan.