

Biosimilars Initiative – etanercept

BC PharmaCare coverage is changing for people taking Enbrel® for plaque psoriasis

What is changing?

The Biosimilars Initiative is switching all PharmaCare-covered patients taking Enbrel (etanercept biologic originator) for plaque psoriasis (PsO) to an etanercept biosimilar option (Brenzys® or Erelzi®):

Originator	Condition	PharmaCare-covered biosimilar	Switch Period
etanercept (Enbrel®)	Plaque psoriasis (PsO)	Brenzys® Erelzi®	April 7, 2021 to October 6, 2021

During the six-month transition period, from April 7, 2021 to October 6, 2021, PharmaCare will cover both the originator and biosimilar options for patients currently taking etanercept for PsO. 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 Brenzys or Erelzi for PsO.

Will I be affected?

You will be affected by this change if you:

- currently use Enbrel for plaque psoriasis, and
- receive PharmaCare coverage.

What are biologic and biosimilar drugs?

Biologic (originator) drugs are medications made by 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 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.

Enbrel 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 develop, 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 keep etanercept coverage?

1. Make an appointment with your prescriber during the switch period from April 7, 2021 to October 6, 2021.
2. Discuss switching to Brenzys or Erelzi 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, if applicable.
4. Speak with your prescriber and initiate your switch to a biosimilar by October 6, 2021.

Where can I get more information?

Visit www.gov.bc.ca/biosimilars for more details about the Biosimilars Initiative.

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 help you determine whether it may be medically necessary to request exceptional Special Authority approval for continued coverage of Enbrel.