



Watch Out for that Vehicle!

Incidences where Saskatchewan pharmacists have prescribed high potency topical corticosteroids (e.g. betamethasone valerate 0.1% ointment) for atopic dermatitis have been reported. This practice is not supported by the minor ailment prescribing guidelines. Minor ailment fee claims will be rejected by the Saskatchewan Drug Plan and Extended Benefits Branch when a high or ultra-high potency steroid is prescribed by a pharmacist for atopic dermatitis.

When selecting OTC products or prescribing topical corticosteroids, consider that the vehicle may affect the potency of the formulation.¹ As a general guide, potencies of products containing the same drug and concentration will be highest in a propylene glycol-containing vehicle followed by ointments and gels and lowest in creams and lotions.² High and ultra-high potency topical corticosteroids have a higher risk of local and systemic adverse effects, and need to be used with caution or avoided in some patient groups and skin areas.³

Pharmacists may prescribe low or moderate potency corticosteroid creams, ointments, lotions, or foams for atopic dermatitis. Patients requiring high or ultra-high potency steroids are to be referred to a physician or nurse practitioner. Ensure that when prescribing, the selected product is included in the Minor Ailment Prescribing Guidelines.

Table 1: Examples of Topical Corticosteroids and Relative Potencies

Drug	Dosage Form	Potency ³ (Higher #-= Lower Potency)	Included in Minor Ailment Guidelines ⁴
Betamethasone valerate 0.05%	Cream, Ointment	5	✓
Betamethasone valerate 0.1%	Cream, Lotion, Scalp Lotion	4-6	✓
Betamethasone valerate 0.1%	Ointment	3	✗
Hydrocortisone-17-valerate 0.2%	Cream	5	✓
Hydrocortisone-17 valerate 0.2%	Ointment	4	✓
Mometasone furoate 0.1%	Cream, Lotion	4	✓
Mometasone furoate 0.1%	Ointment	2-3	✗

For more information, see the Minor Ailment Prescribing Guidelines for atopic dermatitis:

<https://medsask.usask.ca/professional/guidelines/atopic-dermatitis.php>

References:

1. Lexi-Comp Online™, Lexi-Drugs Online™, Hudson, Ohio: Lexi-Comp, Inc.; 2017; June 23, 2017.
2. RxTx[Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Canadian Pharmacists Association; 2017. CPhA. Corticosteroids: Topical; [updated 30 Jan 2017; cited 23 Jun 2017]. Available from: <https://www.e-therapeutics.ca/>.
3. Regier L. Topical Corticosteroids: Comparison Chart. RxFiles drug comparison charts. Saskatoon, SK: Saskatoon Health Region. [updated 30 Mar 2017; accessed 23 Jun 2017]. Available from: www.RxFiles.ca
4. medSask. Atopic Dermatitis-Guidelines for Prescribing Topical Corticosteroids [Internet]. Saskatoon, SK; [updated 30 May 2017; cited 23 Jun 2017]. Available at: <https://medsask.usask.ca/professional/guidelines/atopic-dermatitis.php>.