

Patient information about changes to medicines or treatments on the NHS: [Changes to prescribing of immediate-release fentanyl](#)

The NHS is asking prescribers to stop or greatly reduce the prescribing of some medicines. This is because the medicines are:

- Not as safe as other medicines OR
- Not as good (effective) as other medicines OR
- More expensive than other medicines that do the same thing.

This includes immediate-release fentanyl.

This document will explain why the changes are happening and where you can get more information and support.

[What is immediate release fentanyl?](#)

Fentanyl is a strong painkiller. It is available as an immediate-release painkiller in various dosage forms: tablets, lozenges, films, and nasal spray.

“Immediate-release” means that it acts very quickly, and it is sometimes used for the treatment of “breakthrough” pain in adults with cancer who are already receiving other, longer-acting strong painkillers.

It is also used for other types of pain, but it does not have a licence* for these and can be addictive.

*** Having a licence means that a medicine has passed tests to ensure that it is effective, safe and manufactured to appropriate quality standards.**

What is this change and what is the reason for it?

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) says that immediate-release fentanyl should not be the first choice for “breakthrough” pain in adults with cancer – it should only be used if other options haven’t worked. This is likely to be for just a small number of people.

This change **does not** apply to patients undergoing palliative care treatment or using slow-release versions of fentanyl, which come in patch form. Fentanyl patches will still be available on prescription.

Will my immediate-release fentanyl be stopped?

If you are taking immediate-release fentanyl for palliative care, it will not be stopped. If you are taking immediate-release fentanyl for other types of pain it will be reviewed by your doctor. You may be supported to stop taking immediate-release fentanyl and offered a different painkiller if needed.

You can talk to your doctor about other pain relief options that are available so you can both come to a joint decision on the best option to relieve your pain.

Where can I find more information and support?

- You can speak to your local pharmacist, GP, or the person who prescribed the medication to you.
- National and local charities can offer advice and support, for example:
 - Pain Concern: 0300 123 0789 <http://painconcern.org.uk/>
 - Pain UK: <https://painuk.org>
 - Cancer Research: www.cancerresearchuk.org
 - MacMillan: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/stories-and-media/booklets/managing-cancer-pain>
- The NICE information for patients can be found at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg140/ifp/chapter/About-this-information>
- The Patients Association can also offer support and advice: www.patients-association.org.uk / or freephone 0800 345 7115

- Healthwatch is an online resource where you can feedback on your healthcare experiences: www.healthwatch.co.uk

Find out more about the medicines that are being stopped or reduced:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/items-which-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-policy-guidance/>