Midlands and Lancashire Commissioning Support Unit

Prescribing Tip No. 2 Date: 1st September 2016

Avoid Ibuprofen in Children with Chicken Pox

A reminder has been issued to pharmacists regarding the use of ibuprofen in children with chickenpox. In these children Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) can increase the risk of necrotizing soft-tissue infections and secondary infections caused by invasive streptococci.

The warning to avoid ibuprofen in children with chickenpox is included in national guidance on chickenpox but is not included in patient information leaflets or summaries of product characteristics for all ibuprofen products.

What advice does NICE Clinical Knowledge Summaries give? [1]

- Treating symptoms in an otherwise healthy person:
  - Offer paracetamol to relieve pain or fever - the use of antipyretic agents should be considered in children with fever who appear distressed or unwell. Antipyretic agents should not routinely be used with the sole aim of reducing body temperature in children with fever who are otherwise well. The views and wishes of parents and carers should be taken into consideration.
  - Consider the use of topical calamine lotion to alleviate itch.
  - Chlorphenamine may be useful for itch associated with chickenpox for those who are 1 year of age or older.

- There are concerns that the use of NSAIDs in children with varicella is associated with an increased risk of necrotizing soft-tissue infections and infections with invasive group A beta-haemolytic streptococci.[2] Evidence suggests that there are elevated risks of skin complications in people with varicella when exposed to NSAIDs. These findings have been replicated in several studies.[3, 4] For this reason it is recommended that NSAIDs are avoided in children with varicella.

References:

1. www.cks.nice.org.uk/chickenpox
2. Heininger, U. and Seward, J.F. (2006) Varicella.*Lancet***368**(9544), 1365-1376
3. Bijl, D. (2010) Varicella, herpes zoster and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs: serious cutaneous complications.*Prescrire International***19**(106), 72-73.
4. Mikaeloff, Y., Kezouh, A. and Suissa, S. (2008) Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug use and the risk of severe skin and soft tissue complications in patients with varicella or zoster disease.*British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology***65**(2), 203-209.