



This Practice sting was written in collaboration with [Lareb](#).

Practice sting 2022-14

Practice sting Qutenza patches and occupational exposure

Qutenza® patches contain capsaicin and are used to treat peripheral nerve pain in adults. A physician or healthcare professional under a physician's supervision applies the patch. The patch stays in place for half an hour to an hour. After removing the patch, the physician or healthcare professional should remove any capsaicin not absorbed into the skin with a cleansing gel containing butylated hydroxyanisole.

Notifications

Between August 2014 and April 2022, Netherlands Pharmacovigilance Centre Lareb received twenty-eight reports of complaints due to occupational exposure of healthcare professionals to the patches.

The most common complaints in these reports were:

1. throat and eye irritation
2. bronchospasm
3. cough
4. headache

Until the beginning of 2020, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) also received 105 reports of serious and chronic hypersensitivity reactions, in particular from healthcare providers who have been regularly exposed to the patches occupationally.

Analysis

Capsaicin is a substance found in chili peppers. Skin exposure to capsaicin leads to temporary redness (erythema) and burning sensation, eye and throat irritation and coughing. In the [product insert](#) of Qutenza® these complaints are mentioned as possible side effects that can occur in patients. Similar complaints can also arise from the cleaning butylhydroxyanisole gel for Qutenza®. The gel is included in the package with the patch. The reports to Lareb and the WHO concern healthcare professionals who have come into contact with the patch occupationally. Due to regular exposure, these patches can cause serious and chronic hypersensitivity reactions in the healthcare professional. Complaints can be prevented by taking precautions during the application and removal of plasters.

In the product insert, under "Method of administration" and also under "Special precautions for disposal and other handling" the necessary preventive measures when applying and removing the patches are described. A risk minimization document is also available via the Medicines Information Bank of the Dutch CBG-MEB in which the precautions are listed. However, the information in the reports shows that healthcare professionals do not always adhere to all necessary safety measures.

Recommendations

For healthcare professionals

Be aware of the irritating effect of capsaicin patches and the accompanying cleansing gel. Pay attention to adherence to protocols to avoid unnecessary exposure:

- Apply the Qutenza® patch in a well-ventilated treatment area.
- Always wear nitrile gloves when applying and removing patches. Do not use latex gloves as they do not provide adequate protection.
- Use a face mask and safety glasses.
- During treatment, avoid direct contact with the Qutenza® patch, used gauze or cleansing gel, and avoid contact with the eyes, mouth or other sensitive areas.
- Do not hold the Qutenza® patch close to the eyes or mucous membranes.
- Place used and unused patches and any other materials that have come into contact with the treated area in a polyethylene medical waste bag.