Lamictal® (lamotrigine) – Safety communication

- On April 25, 2018, the FDA announced that Lamictal (lamotrigine) can cause a rare but very serious reaction that excessively activates the body's infection-fighting immune system. This can cause severe inflammation throughout the body and lead to hospitalization and death, especially if the reaction is not diagnosed and treated quickly.

- Lamotrigine is generically available and is an anticonvulsant indicated for the treatment of epilepsy and bipolar disorder. Lamotrigine can be used as monotherapy or adjunctive therapy to treat epilepsy in patients aged 2 years and older. Lamotrigine is also used as maintenance treatment in patients with bipolar disorder to help delay the occurrence of mood episodes such as depression, mania, or hypomania

- The immune system reaction, called hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (HLH), causes an uncontrolled response by the immune system. HLH typically presents as a persistent fever, usually greater than 101°F, and it can lead to severe problems with blood cells and organs throughout the body such as the liver, kidneys, and lungs.

- Patients or their caregivers should contact their health care professionals right away if they experience any symptom of HLH while taking lamotrigine. HLH can occur within days to weeks after starting treatment.

    — Symptoms of HLH include fever, usually >101°F; enlarged liver; symptoms may include pain, tenderness, or unusual swelling over the liver area in the upper right belly; swollen lymph nodes; skin rashes; yellow skin or eyes; unusual bleeding; and nervous system problems, including seizures, trouble walking, difficulty seeing or other visual disturbances.
    — Patients should not stop taking lamotrigine without first taking to their health care professional. Stopping it suddenly can potentially cause uncontrolled seizures, or new or worsening mental health problems.

- Health care professionals should be aware that prompt recognition and early treatment is important for improving HLH outcomes and decreasing mortality.

    — Diagnosis is often complicated because early signs and symptoms such as fever and rash are not specific. HLH may also be confused with other serious immune-related adverse reactions such as drug reaction with eosinophilia and systemic symptoms.
    — Evaluate patients who develop fever or rash promptly, and discontinue lamotrigine if HLH or another serious immune-related adverse reaction is suspected and an alternative etiology for the signs and symptoms cannot be established.
    — Healthcare providers should counsel patients to explain the benefits and risks of lamotrigine every time a new prescription is issued as information may change.

- There have been 8 worldwide cases of confirmed or suspected HLH associated with lamotrigine use in children and adults reported to the FDA and/or in medical literature.

    — Five cases had confirmed HLH and three cases had suspected HLH. All cases were reported to have serious outcomes. All eight reported hospitalization, three reported other serious important medical events, two reported the outcome as being life-threatening, and one reported death.

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— All cases had a plausible temporal relationship with lamotrigine, occurring within 24 days of starting lamotrigine treatment. In seven cases, HLH improved after treatment and discontinuation of Lamictal, and one case did not improve and had a fatal outcome.