

Natural Health Products: Importance of Clear Label Information

Certain medications, including natural health products, are available without a prescription in pharmacies and other retail locations to treat common conditions at home. These medications come in different forms. Some are taken by mouth; others are applied directly to the skin, ear, or eye; and yet others are meant for vaginal or rectal use. To avoid harm, it is important to read a product's instructions and warnings before using it.

ISMP Canada received a report from a consumer who almost took a boric acid vaginal suppository by mouth. The consumer paused before taking the suppository, read the package insert, and realized the product should not be swallowed. This incident was shared with Health Canada and the manufacturer of the suppositories. The manufacturer responded by adding clearer warnings to the outer box, bottle, and product insert. This incident demonstrated the importance of labelling information and showed how one person's report can make a difference to safety.

Before using a natural health product, consider these tips to help make sure it is being used safely and in the right way.

Read all the information provided with the product carefully. This includes reading the Product Facts Table (if available) and the package insert.

Check with a pharmacist or your primary care provider. They can explain how a medication is to be used if you do not understand the written information.

Health Canada also provides useful information about natural health products. This information is designed to help consumers to use these products safely: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/natural-non-prescription/regulation/about-products.html>

To read more information about the changes that were made based on this consumer's report, visit <https://ismpcanada.ca/bulletin/wrong-route-errors/>

✓ Improved packaging for Utiva boric acid vaginal suppository product

New warning label added

DO NOT TAKE ORALLY | PAS POUR USAGE ORAL

Warning (in pink) added to Product Facts table

FOR VAGINAL USE ONLY; NOT FOR ORAL USE. There is enough boric acid in this package to cause serious harm, including death, if ingested. Call the Poison Control Center immediately if accidental ingestion occurs.

Mederror newsletters are reviewed by consumers who are committed to improving medication safety. Learning from consumer reports is shared with health care providers through ISMP Canada publications. This newsletter shares information about safety medication practices, is noncommercial, and is therefore exempt from Canadian anti-spam legislation. *Funding support provided by Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada. Mederror is a component of the Canadian Medication Incident Reporting and Learning Prevention System (CMIRPS).