

Asthma, Allergies, and Birth Control

ALWAYS INSPECT INHALER FOR FOREIGN OBJECTS BEFORE USE

When teaching patients about proper inhaler use, be sure to emphasize how important it is to recap the device after use. The importance of replacing caps was illustrated in an April 2015 BMJ case report. A woman who had asthma accidentally inhaled a small earring while using her asthma medication. She got her uncapped inhaler from her purse. As she inhaled the medication, she felt a painful scratch in her throat and started coughing blood. She was taken to the emergency department, where the earring was removed from her lung. If the inhaler's cap had been in place, the loose earring in her purse would not have gotten into the inhaler.

Another event was reported in April 2015 in England. A woman used her inhaler and suddenly felt something shoot to the back of her throat. She began gasping for air and spitting up blood. She ran outside, and a neighbor came to her rescue and called emergency medical services. The woman eventually coughed out a fake nail that had been part of a set she had worn weeks earlier. In this case, the inhaler's cover had been in place before use, so the nail had probably lodged in the inhaler while using it when wearing the nails.

Tell patients to always inspect the inhaler thoroughly before use to ensure that there are no unwanted

objects within the inhaler. Also advise them to replace the inhaler cap after every use. If a foreign object enters the inhaler, it places the person at risk of breathing in the object and causing choking or respiratory difficulties.

SEASONALE OR SEASONAL?

Inaccurate or inappropriate allergies may be documented in health records when patients report "seasonal allergies." SEASONALE, the brand name of an oral contraceptive containing levonorgestrel and ethinyl estradiol, has been accidentally selected in the allergy field when the intention was to document seasonal allergies. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices received a report of a persistent problem with providers selecting this choice. Their system records only actual substances (such as pollen, birch) to which a patient is allergic. "Seasonal" is not a choice, but staff see Seasonale listed and select it, believing they've found the right term. Thus, inaccurate allergy information is recorded, and the patient might be mistakenly identified with a birth control pill allergy in her medical record.

A similar situation happened in a health care facility. A patient reported that she had seasonal allergies. The nurse typed "seasonal" into the allergy field of the physician office's electronic health record without realizing that the system converted it to Seasonale. Later, upon admission



Teach patients to always replace the cap on the inhaler after use.

to a hospital, a medication reconciliation technician asked the patient about her allergy to Seasonale and learned that the patient did not have a uterus and had no need for the contraceptive, but she did experience seasonal allergies. In this case, no harm occurred, but one can imagine a scenario where a patient's oral contraceptive or hormone replacement therapy is never prescribed, or is discontinued inappropriately, based on the incorrect allergy information.

Remind staff about potential mix-ups between Seasonale and seasonal allergies, and to never select this drug unless the patient is truly allergic to the medication. ■

This article is from the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP). The reports described were received through the USP-ISMP Medication Errors Reporting Program. Errors, near misses, or hazardous conditions may be reported on the ISMP website at www.ismp.org. ISMP can be reached at 215-947-7797 or isminfo@ismp.org.