

# Brush Up on Biosimilars

You'll see **more Rxs for biosimilars**...now that there are over 60 available in Canada. And around 10 were approved in 2024 alone.

For example, there are now several biosimilars approved for ustekinumab (*Stelara*)...with *Pyzchiva* and *Steqeyma* being the latest.

Keep in mind, biosimilars aren't generics. It's not possible to create an exact copy of the original reference product...since biologics contain larger, more complex molecules than most traditional drugs.

This means that biosimilars usually can't be automatically substituted for the reference biologic.

But biosimilars show NO clinically meaningful differences in safety, purity, or potency compared to the reference biologic.

Note that biosimilars may not have all the same indications as the reference product. This is mostly due to patent protection...NOT lack of effectiveness.

Refer to your provincial drug benefit list or provincial laws as your guide to switching to biosimilars.

Watch payer alert screens for messaging as to which product is covered...or if they prefer a different med all together.

For instance, infliximab (*Remicade*) costs about \$2,100 for a 200 mg dose...versus about \$1,000 for the biosimilar *Renflexis*.

Continue to request a new Rx when switching to a biosimilar or when a med switch is required.

Reassure patients that biosimilars are safe and effective. Point out that switching to a biosimilar from its reference product is likely no different than switching between different lots of the reference product.

Stay alert for mix-ups. Verify the trade name and DIN...especially if you stock multiple biosimilars. For example, adalimumab has several biosimilars (*Abrilada*, *Amgevita*, etc).

Be aware of differences between biosimilars. For instance, concentrations and stability vary among adalimumab products...and some may contain latex. Double-check product monographs if needed.

Also keep an eye out for different product strengths. For example, etanercept (*Enbrel*) comes in a 50 mg prefilled syringe, but the biosimilar *Erelzi* comes in both 25 mg and 50 mg prefilled syringes.

Review our resource, Facts About Biosimilars, for more FAQs.

## Key References:

-Health Canada. Biosimilar biologic drugs in Canada: Fact Sheet. August 27, 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/biologics-radiopharmaceuticals-genetic-therapies/applications-submissions/guidance-documents/fact-sheet-biosimilars.html> (Accessed December 18, 2024).

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