

TVFHT Drug Info Blast: Salbutamol MDI and nebule shortage



January 30, 2025

There is a Tier 3 (potential for severe impact) national shortage of salbutamol metered-dose inhalers (MDIs) and nebules due to manufacturing disruptions and increased demand. Supply constraints are expected to persist through Q1 2025, with manufacturers allocating products based on historical demand. Allocations will likely remain in place beyond Q1 2025.

For patients with asthma

This shortage presents an opportunity to transition from salbutamol to budesonide/formoterol in line with GINA guidelines. Preferred alternatives are:

1. Symbicort (budesonide/formoterol) Turbuhaler (DPI) LU code 330
 - Formoterol offers fast-acting and long-acting benefits and has an indication to use as both a controller **and** a reliever inhaler.
 - **Dosing** (as both controller and reliever): 200/6 mcg strength, 1–2 INH BID or 2 INH once daily. Take 1 additional INH PRN for symptoms; repeat after a few minutes if symptoms persist (max 6 INH per event, 8 INH/day).
 - If switching to Symbicort as both a controller and reliever, advise patients to stop their other corticosteroid controller inhaler.
2. Zenhale (mometasone/formoterol) MDI LU code 330
 - Used off-label as a reliever inhaler but reasonable to use in shortage situations.
 - **Dosing** (as reliever): 100/5 mcg strength only, 1 additional INH PRN for symptoms; repeat after a few minutes if symptoms persist (max 6 INH per event, 8 INH/day).
 - If already using Zenhale 200/5 mcg strength as a controller, only the 100/5 mcg strength can be used as a reliever to not exceed the maximum daily dose.

For patients without asthma requiring a short-acting bronchodilator (SABA)

1. Bricanyl (terbutaline) Turbuhaler is the preferred alternative for those with adequate inspiratory force.
 - **Dosing:** 0.5 mg strength, 1 INH Q4-6H PRN. Turbuhaler DPIs require only one puff per dose due to reliable drug delivery into alveoli.
 - Superior drug delivery compared to MDIs, eliminates the need for an Aerochamber, and has a much lower environmental impact (1 MDI ≈ 200 km of car driving in carbon emissions).

References and resources

1. [Salbutamol Metered Dose Inhaler and Nebule Shortage](#) clinical resource by CPhA and MedSask
2. [Drug Shortages Canada](#) is updated regularly with shortage statuses and expected return dates

Acknowledgement: Roland Halil, Bruyère Health Academic Family Medicine

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