

Policy Title: High Alert (Risk) Medications	
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Manual/Section: PC/MM	
Applicable Catalogs: CAH	

Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Livingston HealthCare to put additional safeguards in place for medications that are considered high alert or high risk. This policy and procedure will address the ordering, preparation, administration and monitoring of high alert/risk medications.

Procedure

1. Drugs or drug classes that have been identified as high alert/risk include:
 - Concentrated potassium solutions (potassium chloride, phosphate, acetate)
 - Sodium chloride solutions for injection greater than 0.9%
 - Injectable narcotics for patient controlled analgesia (PCA)
 - IV Chemotherapeutics agents
 - Insulin (IV infusions)
 - Heparin (infusions, syringes, pump setting, labeling)

2. High-alert medications will be prescribed, dispensed, and administered using practices that are deemed safe. All high alert/risk medication use will follow some or all of the following safeguard procedure.
 - Stored and prepared in the Pharmacy
 - Warning label affixed to medication
 - Do not use abbreviations when prescribing or documenting high alert medications
 - Independent double check of the medication, route, dose, correct patient, administration time and any applicable pump settings upon initiation and any change in order.

Specific Safe Practices for High Alert Medications

Drug/Drug Class	Safe Practices
Concentrated potassium solutions (i.e., potassium chloride, potassium phosphate, potassium acetate) for injection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shall not be removed from the Pharmacy Department • Compounded IV admixtures containing potassium shall be prepared in the Pharmacy Department. • Specific guidelines for diluted potassium administration can be found in pharmacy/nursing policies
Injectable narcotics for patient controlled analgesia (PCA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only standard concentration shall be stocked in the patient care areas. • Use of standard order sets are encouraged whenever PCA is prescribed. • Refer to pharmacy/nursing policies for specific administration guidelines.
Sodium chloride solutions for injection greater than 0.9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrated sodium chloride (> 0.9%) may not be stored outside the pharmacy. • Sodium chloride 23.4% and 14.6% solution will be stored segregated from other sodium chloride for injection. • Solutions of greater than 0.9% sodium chloride will be prepared and dispensed from the pharmacy.
Intravenous cytotoxic medications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to administration drug, dose, route, and orders should be double checked by 2 licensed staff. • Precautionary labels will be affixed to all bags and syringes. • IV administration tubing should be attached and primed with diluent (not drug) for all cytotoxic medication infusions. • All cytotoxic medications will be transported in biohazard/cytotoxic bags. • All chemotherapy waste will be disposed of in the appropriate receptacles. • Verbal orders for cytotoxic medications are not permitted. All orders must be written
Insulin (infusions, infusion pump rates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend use of standard order sets (dosing and monitoring protocols) • “High-Alert” sticker placed on all IV insulin infusions sent from pharmacy • Nursing independent double-check of all IV doses or rate changes • Only programmable infusion pumps will be used for IV and continuous infusions
Heparin (therapeutic infusions, syringes prepared outside of pharmacy, labeling, infusion pump rates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend use of standard order sets (dosing and monitoring protocols) • “High-Alert” sticker placed on all IV heparin sent from pharmacy • Nursing independent double-check of all IV doses or rate changes • Only programmable infusion pumps will be used for IV and continuous infusions

3. Additional Safety Measures for Medications

- Standard Concentrations of medicated intravenous infusions shall be used for adult patients

Definitions

High-alert medications: Specific medications that have a heightened risk of causing significant patient harm when used in error.

References

1. High-alert medications and patient safety. *Sentinel Event Alert*, Issue Eleven, November 19, 1999. Accessed at: www.jointcommission.org/SentinelEvents/SentinelEventAlert/sea_11.htm Reducing “at risk behaviors”.
2. ISMP Medication Safety Alert. October 7, 2004. Accessed at: <http://www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acute/acutecare/archives/Oct04.asp>.
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4. ISMP’s list of high-alert medications. December 2003. Accessed at: <http://www.ismp.org/Tools/highalertmedications.pdf>
5. Cohen MR, Kilo CM. High-alert medications: Safeguarding against errors. In; Cohen MR, Ed. *Medication Errors*. American Pharmacists Association, Washington, DC, 1999.

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