

# SSRIs

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**United Kingdom** - The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has issued a reminder on selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor use (SSRIs). This reminder is prompted by a number of studies on SSRIs published in the *British Medical Journal*.

During the course of 2004, an Expert Working Group convened by the MHRA reviewed evidence on SSRIs. It published its advice, together with the evidence on which that advice was based, in December 2004. The group considered a huge range of evidence, both published and unpublished. The Expert Group published a number of conclusions and recommendations, including the following:

- The balance of risks and benefits remains positive in those groups of patients for whom treatment with SSRIs is indicated. Whilst the evidence suggests that a modest increase in suicidal thoughts and self-harm for SSRIs compared with placebo cannot be ruled out, this needs to be offset against the benefits of treatment with SSRIs, and the risks associated with not treating the condition.
- Careful and frequent monitoring by healthcare professionals and, where appropriate, other carers in the early stages of treatment is necessary. Evidence reviewed by the expert group shows that the risk of self-harm in depressed patients is greatest around the time of presentation to medical services. The advice, based on years of clinical experience, has therefore always been

that the risk of self harm may increase in the early stages of treatment for depressive illness.

- The balance of risks and benefits for the treatment of depression in children under the age of 18 is unfavourable in paroxetine, venlafaxine, sertraline, citalopram, escitalopram and mirtazapine. It is not possible to assess the balance of risks and benefits for fluvoxamine due to the absence of paediatric clinical trial data. The balance of risks and benefits is judged to be favourable for fluoxetine. Given that people mature at different rates, the group also advised close monitoring of young adults.

The report of the Expert Working Group on SSRIs can be found at <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/news/2004/SSRIfinal.pdf>. The advice given to healthcare professionals at the time the report was published can be found at [http://www.mhra.gov.uk/news/2004/SSRI\\_Letter\\_061204.pdf](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/news/2004/SSRI_Letter_061204.pdf)

**Reference:** *MHRA highlights its recent advice on SSRIs*, 18 February 2005. <http://www.mhra.gov.uk/>

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<http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/d/Js7917e/2.17.html#Js7917e.2.17>