



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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NOTICE: CISATRACURIUM; 5MG/2.5ML; INJECTION; 2.5ML AND CISATRACURIUM; 10MG/5ML; INJECTION; 5ML STOCK SUPPLY SHORTAGE AND THE PROPOSED THERAPEUTIC ALTERNATIVES

The Standard Treatment Guidelines (STGs) and Essential Medicines List (EML)¹ currently recommends cisatracurium as a Non-Depolarising Muscle Relaxant (NDMR) in patients with renal or liver impairment. The contracted supplier of cisatracurium, Accord Healthcare (Pty) Ltd, is however currently unable to meet their contract obligation resulting in supply constraints.

Accord Healthcare (Pty) Ltd has indicated that the third-party manufacturer has discontinued the production of cisatracurium and efforts are underway to identify and secure an alternative manufacturer. However, timelines for restoration of supply remain uncertain.

Intermediate-acting NDMRs are currently recommended in a therapeutic class. The choice of NDMRs is largely dependent on the onset and duration of action, adverse reactions, metabolism and elimination of the agent. Refer to the table below:

Medicine	Intubation dose (mg/kg)	Time to intubation (onset)	Duration	Elimination
Cisatracurium	0.1–0.15 (10.5mg) #	4–6 min	45–55 mins	Eliminated by Hoffman degradation; can be used in renal or liver impairment.
Atracurium	0.3–0.6 (42mg) #	3–5 min	15–35 mins	Eliminated by Hoffman degradation; can be used in renal or liver impairment.
Rocuronium	0.6–1.2 (84mg) #	1–2 min	45–60 mins	Significantly prolonged duration of action in end-stage renal disease, with the risk of accumulation following repeat maintenance doses.

Estimated maximum dose for a 70 kg adult

Note:

- Atracurium is eliminated by Hoffman degradation and ester hydrolysis² and can therefore be safely used in renal or liver impairment but a potential for histamine release exists in susceptible patients during administration.

There are two alternatives to cisatracurium:

1. For patients with renal or liver impairment, atracurium is the preferred alternative. Facilities are advised to reserve atracurium for use while cisatracurium is in short supply. While demand for atracurium 50 mg injection has exceeded forecasted estimates, the supplier has confirmed stock availability of atracurium 25 mg injection.
2. For all other patients, rocuronium may be used.

¹ Standard Treatment Guidelines and Essential Medicines List for South Africa. Hospital Level: Adults. 2024 Edition.

² Craig RG, Hunter JM. Neuromuscular blocking drugs and their antagonists in patients with organ disease. *Anaesthesia* 2009;64 Supp 1:55.

Options to consider in patients with hepatic/renal dysfunction if neither cisatracurium nor atracurium is available:

1. If muscle relaxation is required only to facilitate intubation, consider the safety of suxamethonium*, or NMBA-free intubation, e.g. use of propofol/remifentanyl combination, and/or good topicalization of the vocal cords.
2. If rocuronium is used, ensure the use of neuromuscular monitoring throughout the case. Maintain the least degree of block that is safe and workable and try to avoid redosing. Pay attention to adequacy of ventilation, as a raised pCO₂ is a potent respiratory stimulant (correlate with ABG if in any doubt).
3. Neostigmine is an appropriate reversal agent once sufficient recovery of block has occurred.

Note:

- *Suxamethonium is considered safe in chronic renal failure if there is no associated uraemic neuropathy or preoperative hyperkalaemia. Repeated doses should be avoided. Caution in acute renal failure.

Procurement information

In the interim period of the cisatracurium stock supply shortage, the following quotation(s) have been solicited by the National Department of Health (NDoH) as follows (ref: PPQ02/2026):

Date initiated: 03 March 2026				
Expiry date: 30 June 2026 or upon depletion of quoted quantities				
NSN: 180308024		Item Description: Cisatracurium; 10mg/5ml; injection; 5 ml		
No	Supplier Name	Quantity Quoted	Status	Contact Person
1.	Fresenius Kabi SA (PTY) Ltd	12 000	• Available in 56 days: 12 000 units	albertha.nel@fresenius-kabi.com
2.	Pharmacare Ltd	N/A	• No quote	StateQuotes@aspenspharma.com
3.	Viatrix Healthcare (Pty) Ltd	N/A	• No quote	Kumaraswamy.Ekhambaram@viatrix.com

The following products are available on National Contract and are available for ordering:

NSN	Product	Supplier	Contract
180075518	Atracurium; 25mg/2.5ml; injection; 2.5 ml	Pharmacare Ltd	HP06-2024SVP
180075520	Atracurium; 50mg/5ml; injection; 5 ml	Pharmacare Ltd	
180960252	Rocuronium Bromide; 50mg/5ml; injection; 5 ml	Biotech Laboratories (Pty) Ltd	
180076785	Suxamethonium; 100mg/2ml; injection; 2 ml	Fresenius Kabi SA (Pty) Ltd	

Circular implementation and dissemination

Provinces and facilities are reminded to ensure equitable and timely access to atracurium as per the STGs and EML above, and to facilitate availability.

Kindly distribute and communicate this information in consultation with the Pharmaceutical and Therapeutics Committees and all other relevant stakeholders.

Kind regards


MS K JAMALOODIEN
CHIEF DIRECTOR: SECTOR-WIDE PROCUREMENT
DATE: 9/3/2026