



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health**

## **Information for Consumers and Carers Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Listing Changes - FILGRASTIM**

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) listings for filgrastim have been amended to make certain changes in the way they may be prescribed. The effect of the changes is to allow substitution between brands on the PBS.

Nivestim<sup>®</sup> and Zarzio<sup>®</sup> are biosimilar brands of filgrastim and are listed on the PBS together with the reference biological medicine Neupogen<sup>®</sup>.

Medicines on the PBS are subsidised by the Australian Government.

### **What is filgrastim?**

Filgrastim is a biological medicine that is used to treat patients with low white blood cell counts, including following treatment of chemotherapy. Your doctor can discuss with you the detailed requirements around prescribing PBS subsidised filgrastim.

More information about this medicine is available by entering 'filgrastim' at the [NPS MedicineWise Medicine Finder](#).

### **What are biological and biosimilar medicines?**

Biological medicines, including biosimilars, contain substances made by living cells or organisms. They are more complex to make than chemical based medicines.

A biosimilar medicine is a highly similar version of a reference biological medicine, which is the first brand to market. Biosimilar medicines are used to treat the same diseases, in the same way, as the reference biological medicines.

Biosimilar medicines have been tested and shown to be as safe and effective as the reference biological medicines.

### **PBS brand substitution**

The independent expert Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee recommended that all brands of filgrastim could be marked with an 'a' flag in the Schedule of Pharmaceutical Benefits, indicating that they are substitutable.

When PBS brands are listed as substitutable the pharmacist can dispense any brand, with permission from the patient, unless directed otherwise by the prescriber.

### **Who chooses the brand?**

The choice of which brand of filgrastim to use is made by the doctor in consultation with the patient. Specific patient requirements will remain for discussion between a patient and their doctor.

**Will I have the same health outcome no matter which brand of filgrastim I use?**

Yes. The Therapeutic Goods Administration approved the biosimilars of Neupogen® because they were determined to be as safe and effective as Neupogen® and provide the same health outcomes.

**Why are biosimilar medicines important?**

The growing cost of new and innovative medicines, including biological medicines, continues to put pressure on the financial sustainability of the PBS. Seven of the ten most expensive medicines subsidised by the PBS in 2017-18 were biological medicines with a combined cost of \$1.53 billion. The introduction of biosimilar medicines encourages brand competition in the Australian market. This will lead to a reduction in the cost of biological medicines, ensuring the government can continue to subsidise access to new and innovative treatments for seriously ill patients.

**Where can I find more Information?**

The biosimilars page on the [Australian Government Department of Health website](#)

The biosimilars regulation page on the [Therapeutic Goods Administration website](#)