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IN BRIEF

Pruritus Following Antihistamine Discontinuation

The FDA is requiring a new warning in the prescription and over-the-counter labels of the oral second-generation H_1-antihistamines cetirizine (*Zyrtec,* and others) and levocetirizine (*Xyzal*, and others) about the risk of severe pruritus following discontinuation of treatment.[1]

Cases reported to the FDA Adverse Events Reporting System were rare (209 worldwide reports over >6 years), but many of them described severe pruritus requiring medical intervention that occurred within a few days of stopping cetirizine or levocetirizine. Most cases occurred after more than 3 months of daily use, but some occurred after less than one month. The mechanism of the effect is unknown.

Restarting the antihistamine improved pruritus symptoms in most patients; subsequently tapering off the drug resolved symptoms in some of these patients.

Whether switching to another antihistamine, such as loratadine (*Claritin*, and others) or fexofenadine (*Allegra*, and others), would prevent or improve pruritus or whether these drugs could carry a similar risk after their discontinuation is unknown. Some expert clinicians have prescribed (off-label) the interleukin-4 receptor alpha antagonist dupilumab *(Dupixent)* or the recombinant anti-IgE monoclonal antibody omalizumab (*Xolair*, and biosimilar), both of which are FDA-approved for treatment of chronic spontaneous urticaria,[2,3] for treatment of patients whose symptoms persist following taper and discontinuation of cetirizine or levocetirizine. ■

1. FDA Drug Safety Communication. FDA requires warning about rare but severe itching after stopping long-term use of oral allergy medicines cetirizine or levocetirizine (Zyrtec, Xyzal, and other trade names). May 16, 2025. Available at: https://bit.ly/4kelrKz. Accessed July 30, 2025.
2. In brief: Dupilumab (Dupixent) for chronic spontaneous urticaria. Med Lett Drugs Ther 2025; 67:111.
3. Omalizumab (Xolair) for chronic urticaria. Med Lett Drugs Ther 2013; 55:43.

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