

# Prescribing S/C morphine for Palliative care patients<sup>1</sup>

## Simplified guidance

Most palliative care patients requiring injectable opioids can be very adequately managed using S/C morphine or S/C diamorphine. Morphine is the recommended first choice by NHS Cumbria unless higher doses are required (>180mg SC morphine/24h)<sup>2</sup> Ensure you are confident and familiar with the drug you are prescribing.

## Approximate dose equivalents

Syringe driver prescription		Breakthrough pain prescription	
Diamorphine mg/24h	Morphine mg/24h	Diamorphine mg 4h or as required	Morphine mg 4h or as required
10	15	2.5	4
20	30	5	7.5
30	45	5	7.5
40	60	7.5	10
60	90	10	15
90	130	15	20
100	150	15	20
200	300	30	45
300	450	50	75
400	600	60	90

Ampoules of morphine sulphate come in 10, 15, 20 and 30mg strengths  
Compatibilities for syringe drivers are broadly similar to diamorphine. Detailed compatibilities are available from:

[www.palliativedrugs.com](http://www.palliativedrugs.com)

[www.palliativeinfo.org](http://www.palliativeinfo.org)

See [http://www.npc.co.uk/policy/resources/mixing\\_of\\_medicines.pdf](http://www.npc.co.uk/policy/resources/mixing_of_medicines.pdf) for generic advice about mixing medicines

**To convert from *oral* morphine to *subcutaneous* morphine,  
divide the dose in mg by 2**

Example: 10mg of immediate release (IR) morphine such as Oramorph is equivalent to 5mg S/C morphine. Likewise for slow release preparations, MST 30mg 12-hourly is equivalent to MST 60mg/24hours orally and dividing this by two gives a S/C morphine equivalent of 30mg S/C morphine/24hours.

Use diamorphine for patients who need high doses (>180mgSC morphine/24h).

Other alternatives are parenteral oxycodone and fentanyl patches.

Please liaise with specialist palliative care services or pharmacy for conversion advice.

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<sup>2</sup> Morphine is less soluble than diamorphine. 1,000mg of morphine sulphate needs 21mls of water to dissolve at room temperature. The maximum strength of morphine injection available is 30mg/ml, so the minimum volume needed to administer 1,000mg morphine is 33mls (1,000mg of diamorphine will dissolve in 1.6mls of water!!!). 180mg morphine sulphate is 6mls.