

Are My Asthma Inhalers Safe?

If you have asthma and are taking **Serevent®**, **Foradil®**, **Advair®** or **Symbicort®** the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) is concerned about the safety of the LABA (long acting beta agonists) contained in the inhalers. The FDA is recommending changes to the way the inhalers are prescribed.

What is the action of LABA in the body?

LABA relax the muscles around the breathing tubes for up to 12 hours. LABA do not treat or control the inflammation inside the breathing tubes caused by asthma. Salmeterol® and Foradil® contain LABA alone, while Advair® and Symbicort® contain LABA and an inhaled steroid.

What are the risks of LABA?

The use of a LABA by itself (Serevent®, Foradil®) have been associated with increased risk of severe asthma symptoms, hospitalization and even death compared to people not taking LABA. It is not known if the LABA is to blame or if the people taking LABA tend to have more severe asthma. More studies are needed to look at the overall safety of LABA in asthmatic patients. There is **no data** that a combination of a LABA plus an inhaled steroid (Advair®, Symbicort®) has the same side effects as LABA alone.

What does the FDA recommend?

The FDA currently recommends the following:

1. LABA should never be used ALONE to treat asthma (Serevent®, Foradil®).
2. LABA must be used with an inhaled steroid to treat asthma (Advair®, Symbicort®).
2. LABA should be added when asthma symptoms are not controlled on moderate or high dose inhaled steroids alone.
3. Like all asthma medications, the lowest dose of LABA should be used to control asthma symptoms. Once asthma symptoms have been controlled for at least 3 months, the FDA recommends your provider attempt to “step-down” to a lower dose of inhaled medicine if possible.

When should I call my provider?

Call your provider if you develop any of the following:

1. Your asthma has gotten worse since starting an inhaler with a LABA.
2. You are having side effects to the LABA such as difficulty breathing, fast or irregular heart beat, jittery feelings, dizziness, headache, hoarseness or more frequent infections.
3. Your asthma is uncontrolled and you experience asthma symptoms more than twice a week during the day or more than twice a month at night.

It is important for you to be seen regularly even when you are feeling well so your medications can be adjusted when possible.