

21 March 2020

COVID-19 - Advice for prescribers and pharmacists about medicines supply

Safe medicines management for people on regular medicines

People on regular medicines should always have enough for at least 1 – 2 weeks.

People needing a fresh prescription should contact their general practice (or other usual prescriber) and discuss their options:

- a consultation by visit, telephone or online, or
- if a renewed prescription is available for them without a consultation.

Patient illness or self-isolation are not barriers for people getting medicines from their pharmacy. Prescribers can send new prescriptions to the patient's nominated pharmacy, and people can:

- have someone else (family member, friend or carer) collect their dispensed medicines for them, or
- ask their pharmacy to arrange delivery to their home.

Close co-ordination between prescribers and pharmacists, particularly for our most vulnerable people, will help them receive their medicines in a timely way, and maintain community confidence in the resilience of our medicines supply system.

People seeking to stockpile medicines

At this time people on regular medicines may be very anxious about continuity of medicines supply, and seek to stockpile medicines – by, for example, asking for:

- a fresh 3-month prescription soon after the previous
- early dispensing of outstanding prescription repeats
- all-at-once (stat) dispensing of prescription medicines usually dispensed monthly, or
- large quantities of pharmacist-only, pharmacy-only or retail sale medicines.

The Medical Council of NZ has issued a [statement](#) [insert hyperlink] advising health professionals against enabling people to stockpile medicines.

All health professionals are asked to:

- decline such requests, as patient stockpiling of medicines will potentially lead to more medicine stock shortages, and
- reassure people that PHARMAC, pharmacies and suppliers continue to work closely together to maintain continuous medicines supply, and to minimise and fairly distribute any medicines in short supply.

We all have a role to play in keeping medicines available for our community.

Reminder – prescription period and date

Prescribers may legally prescribe at most a 3-month supply of any pharmaceutical, except:

- Class B controlled drugs – maximum prescription period is 1 month, and
- oral contraceptives – maximum is 6 months.

The date on the prescription must be the date the prescriber signed it. Forward- or open-dating prescriptions is not legal and carries significant risks, including confusing the patient's health record.

Pharmacies may dispense prescriptions no later than 3 months from the date of the prescription (but just 7 days for Class B controlled drugs).

Prescribing for people receiving dose-packed medicines

Another threat to medicines supply is avoidable medicines waste. Changes to medicines for people receiving dose-packed medicines, if not aligned with pharmacy dose-packing cycles, can mean many medicines already packed must be disposed of. Prescribers for people who receive dose-packed medicines, in their own home or in residential care, can help minimise medicines waste by indicating on the prescription or medicine chart whether a change:

- must be immediate, or
- may be implemented with the next dose-pack.

Information about supply of specific medicines and management of shortages

Information about specific medicines in short-supply is available from PHARMAC here:

<https://www.pharmac.govt.nz/information-for/enquiries/>.

Hospital pharmacists receive a weekly update from PHARMAC about supply issues affecting hospital medicines.

More detailed information for all health professionals about how to minimise and manage medicines shortages is available from Canterbury DHB's Medicines Information Service here:

<http://www.medicinesinformation.co.nz/2020/03/20/medicines-and-covid-19/>.