

Medicines Factsheet

Information on medicines supply for patients



Your local pharmacy team is working hard to make sure you get the medicines you need, when you need them, but we – like many other pharmacies – sometimes experience difficulties in sourcing medicines.

We know how important getting your medicines is. Our team are always happy to talk to you about your medicines and to explain why getting your medicine may be difficult for us at the moment. We will also explain what that will mean for your treatment.

Why can I not be given my prescribed medicine today?

Unfortunately, the pharmacy does not have all or some of the medicine you need in stock today. The pharmacy team will talk to you about what this means. They may be able to give you some of the medicines you need but not to fulfil (or complete) all of your prescription just yet. They may be sourcing your medicine(s) from different suppliers or awaiting the order to come in from the supplier.. Sometimes they may need to speak to your GP about getting a different medicine prescribed for you.

Why is my medicine not in stock?

There are many reasons why pharmacies are not always able to get certain medicines. Shortages of medicines can occur for different reasons. For example, manufacturers of medicines can have problems with making the medicine, transporting the medicines, or have problems with ingredients for medicines. Sometimes when lots of people are suddenly prescribed a medicine this can use up the available supply.

There has been a growing number of medicine supply issues for a combination of reasons, particularly in the first half of 2022. Pharmacy teams are spending an increasing amount of time trying to get medicines for their patients.

The community pharmacy sector is working with Government and others to address disruptions in the supply of medicines and to put measures in place to mitigate these issues, where possible.



I can't get my medicine from you (my usual pharmacy) but another pharmacy has it – why is that?

There are a number of reasons why some pharmacies may have different medicines available:

- Pharmacies may use different suppliers or wholesalers to source medicines so availability will depend on whether each pharmacy's suppliers have stock or not.
- Where there is a known shortage of a medicine, supply levels can change quickly. This can be different for different areas of the country. This is why pharmacies in one area may be able to find a medicine and others may not.
- Some manufacturers and suppliers may restrict the amount of a specific medicine that a pharmacy can order. This is known as a quota allocation. Once a pharmacy has used up their allocation for the month it can be difficult for them to get any more of that medicine until the start of the next month.

What is the difference between branded medicines and generics?

Medicines will often have more than one name:

- A **generic name** which is the ingredient of the active medicine (for example, ibuprofen). They are often made by several different medicines manufacturers.
- A **brand** is the name the manufacturer or pharmaceutical company gives to the medicine (for example, Nurofen). Only that manufacturer can make that specific brand.



If your doctor prescribes by brand name, the law says that pharmacies have to supply that brand, which can cause delays if there is a problem with it. If your doctor prescribes using a generic name, we can supply any available product which matches that drug description.

Why are my new tablets a different size, shape or colour?

Because some medicines are occasionally in short supply, your usual tablets may not be available. In this case, to make sure you don't go without your regular medication pharmacies may be able to supply you with the same medicine but from a different manufacturer (i.e. a generic medicine). This means that your tablets may look different, but they will still contain the active ingredient(s) that your doctor prescribed. If you have any queries about your medicines, you can ask to speak to the pharmacist.

What are you doing to help?

If your usual medicine is not in stock, please be assured that we are working hard to try to find the right medicines for you and for all our patients. Things that we may be doing for you include:

- Making many phone calls to different suppliers to try to find the medicine you need.
- 'Staged' or part-dispensing – this is where we may only give you some of your medicines and we will ask you to come back to collect the rest of the prescription later.
- Seeing if stock may be available in other local pharmacies.
- Liaising with GPs to find a different medicine that may be suitable for you.

In the event of a serious shortage of a medicine, a protocol may be issued by the Government to allow your pharmacist to supply an alternative quantity or product, if appropriate. To provide access to treatment in a timely manner, such protocols could allow supply of a different strength or formulation (or possibly an alternative) to your usual drug. The pharmacist will advise you on taking this different medicine.

Drug shortages are a national (and sometimes global) problem and the national pharmacy representative bodies will continue to work with the Department of Health and Social Care to help resolve these problems.



What can patients do to help?

There are a few things that you can do to help:

- Order any medicines that you need from us in good time (but no more than seven days before it is due).
- Only order medicines that you need. If you have unused medicines in your cupboard, please use these first (remember to check the expiry date) and please do not order extra medicines.

Patients and healthcare professionals, such as pharmacists and GPs, are asked to order medicines as they usually would. This is because overprescribing, ordering or stockpiling medicines can contribute to any supply problems and create medicine shortages for others.

We are working hard to try to source affected medicines so please bear with us if we are having difficulty getting the medicines for you.