

Dealing with medicines supply issues

Leaflets on individual medicines are available on the Medicines for Children website, www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk.



Medicines for Children has written this information to help parents and carers understand the issues around the supply of medicines and what they can do to make sure they have enough medicines for their children.

Why are there shortages of some medicines?

- Medicines contain many different ingredients, which may come from many different countries. In addition, manufacturing may be complex. This means that there are many steps in the process where delays may occur.
- The way that medicines are bought and stocked has been changing over the last few years, which has led to problems with supplies of some medicines. This has been happening in many countries, not just in the UK.
- The COVID-19 pandemic affected supplies of medicines worldwide.
- When the UK left the European Union (Brexit), the Government took steps to ensure the continued supply of medicines in the UK. However, systems, processes and regulations relating to the manufacture and supply of medicines are changing following Brexit.
- Some areas may have difficulty obtaining medicines for a short period of time.
- Sometimes the regulations about particular medicines change.
- In some cases, a manufacturer decides to stop making a particular strength of medicine or a particular formulation (e.g. liquid medicine or rectal suppository).
- In some cases, demand for a medicine is greater than expected.

What can I do if my usual pharmacy has run out of a medicine?

If the supply of a particular medicine is affected, the National Health Service (NHS) may put procedures in place so that doctors and pharmacists know how to manage the shortage.

Pharmacies may try to obtain supplies from other local pharmacies on your behalf. If your usual pharmacy cannot obtain a supply of the medicine you need, they will discuss other options with you. They may suggest you take the prescription to another pharmacy to dispense all the items.

Pharmacies may also suggest that you ask your doctor for a prescription for the individual medicine, so that you can take this to a different pharmacy. Occasionally, the pharmacist may need to discuss a suitable alternative with the person who prescribed the medicine and request a new prescription.

It is important to remember that pharmacists are not to blame for any shortages of medicines, and they work hard to help patients. Unfortunately, there have been reports of people being rude or aggressive with pharmacy staff because of medicines shortages.

Can I ask for a larger supply?

It is tempting to keep more of your child's medicine at home, in case there is a shortage. However, this may mean that another person cannot have the medicine. We recommend that you keep 2 weeks supply of each medicine at home. However, please do not request extra supplies as this may make the situation worse.

Why have I been given a different brand?

Some medicines are only available as a particular brand. However, many medicines that have been used for some time are available from several different manufacturers and are prescribed by the generic name. This is the name of the actual medicine, rather than the brand name. For example, paracetamol is a generic name. It is also sold under brand names such as Calpol and Panadol.

For most medicines, pharmacies are allowed to dispense whichever brand they have in stock. This means that you may not get the same brand every time, but the medicine will be the same. However, there are a few medicines that must be prescribed by brand name, because the brands differ. These include:

- ciclosporin
- lithium
- CFC-free beclometasone metered dose inhalers
- some medicines used to treat epilepsy
- hormone medicines (growth hormone, erythropoietin)
- insulin
- some modified (slow)-release medicines
- adrenaline pens/auto-injectors
- special formulations such as patches.

Patients or carers may be confused or anxious about differences in product name, appearance or taste, particularly people with autism, learning difficulties or mental health problems.

If you are worried about being given another product instead of your regular one, or if you or your child experience problems with a different brand, discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist. However, continue to give the medicine in the meantime, as stopping it may cause harm.

My doctor has prescribed a different medicine

Occasionally, if a medicine is no longer available or is difficult to obtain, your doctor may prescribe a different treatment to make sure that your child stays well. If you have concerns about this, discuss it with your doctor.

In some cases, your doctor may prescribe the same medicine but in a different form. For example, one particular dose of diazepam given via the rectum, is no longer available because of manufacturing issues. Instead, children can have a dose of diazepam in a nasal spray or liquid medicine.

Can I get medicines online instead?

It may be tempting to obtain medicines that you need for your child from an online pharmacy. You will still need a prescription to do this.

It is important to make sure that the pharmacy is registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council by checking their website <https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/registers>.

Unfortunately, there are websites that claim to provide medicines but which are not registered pharmacies; they may be supplying counterfeit (fake) medicines or products that have not been approved for use in the UK. These products may contain too much or too little (or indeed, none) of the actual medicine, they may be out of date, or may contain substances that are not approved. Such products may be a risk to health.

You can read more about the issue of fake medicines here: <https://www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk/news/the-risks-of-buying-medicines-online/>

We recommend that you obtain medicines from your local pharmacy. This means that help is at hand if you have any problems or questions.

You can read further information about individual medicines by searching (A–Z) on the Medicines Information pages on the Medicines for Children [website](#).

Who to contact for more information

Your child's doctor, pharmacist or nurse will be able to give you more information about your child's medicines.

If you look for information on the internet, make sure it is from a professional organisation and is up to date.

You can also get useful information from:

England: NHS 111

Tel 111

www.nhs.uk

Scotland: NHS 24

Tel 111

www.nhs24.scot

Wales: NHS 111 Wales

Tel 111

www.111.wales.nhs.uk

Northern Ireland: NI Direct

www.nidirect.gov.uk

www.medicinesforchildren.org.uk