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| Advice to pharmacists supplying medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic |
| Updated March 2021 |

Public health emergency orders have been issued to enable the supply of prescription medicines in special circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### PHEO #2 - Public health emergency order ([Gazette No. S 133 Tuesday 23 March 2021, Page 1](http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2021/GG2021S133.pdf)) for emergency supply without a prescription to people affected by COVID-19 currently in place until 27 September 2020 has been extended until 27 September 2021, unless earlier revoked

A patient can receive a supply of Schedule 4 medicine without a prescription, where the pharmacist is satisfied there is immediate need. The medicine must have been previously prescribed, be for continuation of current essential treatment and it is impracticable to obtain a prescription.

The quantity to be supplied is no more than:

* For medicines that are on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the standard Pharmaceutical Benefits maximum quantity, or
* For medicines that are not on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the quantity that is contained in the smallest standard pack in which the medicine is generally available.

The pharmacist must record: (a) name and address of the patient; (b) name, form, strength and quantity of the medicine; (c) directions for use of the medicine as determined by the pharmacist; (d) name and address of the authorised practitioner who last prescribed that medicine; (e) date of supply; (f) name of the pharmacist by whom the medicine was supplied; and (g) that the medicine was supplied under the public health emergency order.  The medicine must be labelled as for a dispensed medicine.

Schedule 8 medicine may NOT be supplied under this public health emergency order.

**PHEO #4 - Public health emergency order (**[**Gazette No. S 133 Tuesday 23 March 2021, Pages 2-3**](http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2021/GG2021S133.pdf)**) for supply on a digital image of an original paper prescription transmitted by the prescriber until midnight 6 October 2020, has been extended until 27 September 2021, unless earlier revoked**

A pharmacist can supply a Schedule 4 medicine (excluding drugs of dependence) on a digital image of an original paper prescription transmitted by the prescriber. The digital image of the paper prescription must be an unaltered photo image or unaltered facsimile image of an original prescription. Forms of transmission of the digital image from the prescriber to the pharmacist may include email, SMS, facsimile or other means of electronic transmission.

The digital image of the original prescription must be transmitted directly from the prescriber (or an employee acting in accordance with the instruction of the practitioner) but not via the patient or any other intermediary.

The pharmacist must: (a) retain a copy of the digital image upon which the supply is made for 2 years; (b) record that the sale or supply was made under this public health emergency order (PHEO #4); (c) produce a copy of the digital image if requested by an authorized officer.

A pharmacist is not required to obtain the original paper prescription, as the prescriber is required to retain the original paper prescription for 2 years.

Drugs of dependence may NOT be supplied under this public health emergency order. Drugs of dependence include all opioids, benzodiazepines and anabolic steroids.

***Amendment 11 May 2020*** *– The original prescription must include the handwritten signature of the prescriber except where it is not possible for the prescription to include the handwritten signature due to operation of telehealth, the prescriber may include a digital image of their handwritten signature or give access to the digital image of their handwritten signature to an employee, where the employee acts in accordance with the instruction of the prescriber to apply the digital image of the prescriber’s signature to the original prescription.*

***Extended 10 September 2020*** *– This Order has been extended until 27 March 2021, unless earlier revoked.*

***Extended 23 March 2021*** *– This Order has been extended until 27 September 2021, unless earlier revoked. The Order was also amended to clarify that a repeat authorisation may be dispensed from the same pharmacy which received the digital image of the original prescription in accordance with the public health emergency order, including if this order is no longer in force.*

# Usual regulatory arrangements still apply

**Supplying medicines under the 3 day emergency supply provision without a prescription**

In an emergency where a pharmacist considers that the supply of a Schedule 4 medicine is necessary to ensure continuity of treatment a pharmacist may supply 3 days’ supply or, if it is not practical to supply a quantity required for 3 days, the smallest commercially available pack. Before doing so, a pharmacist must be satisfied that there is an immediate need for the medicine and that it is impracticable for the patient to obtain a prescription in time to meet that need. The pharmacist must also be satisfied that the patient has previously been prescribed the medicine and ensure that the patient, or person caring for the patient, is aware of the appropriate dose of the medicine.

Note: a pharmacist must not supply a Schedule 4 medicine that would continue treatment that has already been continued by supplying under this exception.

**Supplying medicines on emergency verbal directions of an authorised prescriber**

The usual arrangements for the supply of Schedule 8 medicine remain. A pharmacist may dispense Schedule 8 medicine in accordance with a verbal instruction from the prescriber in an emergency. The pharmacist can confirm the patient’s current medication details with the prescriber, or a prescriber may direct a pharmacist to supply a medicine to a patient in an emergency, by providing a telephone order.  The prescriber must forward a paper prescription to the pharmacy as soon as practicable, confirming the instruction.

**Continued dispensing of selected PBS medicines**

When a pharmacist considers that a supply of a Schedule 4 medicine is necessary to ensure continuity of treatment a pharmacist may supply Schedule 4 medicine listed in the National Health (Continued Dispensing) Determination 2012 and that have been approved by the Minister without a prescription if the pharmacist has not previously supplied that medicine to the patient in accordance with this provision during the previous 12 months. The medicines include certain oral contraceptives and statins.

# Opioid replacement therapy/pharmacotherapy program

If a patient is being treated with methadone or buprenorphine for opioid replacement therapy and is unable to access their designated pharmacy, contact DirectLine on 1800 888 236 to locate a pharmacotherapy approved pharmacy.

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