



Advice for pharmacists supplying medicines to patients during the COVID-19 public health state of emergency

The following arrangements apply for supply of prescription medicines from a pharmacy for patients who are unable to obtain prescriptions due to disruption caused by COVID-19 or other natural disasters, such as bushfires or cyclones.

A temporary, special authority extending continued dispensing provisions has been issued by the WA Chief Health Officer. This permits supply of Schedule 4 prescription medicines from a pharmacy in WA in circumstances where a patient does not have a current prescription. [This authority](#) remains in place whilst the COVID-19 public health state of emergency applies.

The 'continued dispensing' provisions are only applicable where it is impracticable for the patient to obtain a prescription. Electronic prescriptions or the COVID-19 related arrangements for dispensing from 'digital images' of prescriptions are encouraged to be used by prescribers and pharmacists, if circumstances permit.

Special authority for emergency supply of Schedule 4 medicines during COVID-19

A pharmacist may dispense a supply of any Schedule 4 medication, without a prescription, where the pharmacist is satisfied that:

- there is an immediate need and the medication is a current, essential treatment;
- the supply is continuation of a previously prescribed medication; and
- it is impracticable for the patient to obtain a prescription.

The quantity to be supplied is no more than:

- for a Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) item, the standard maximum PBS quantity; or
- for a non-PBS medicine, the smallest standard pack size.

The pharmacist must record:

- patient's name and address;
- name, strength and quantity of the medicine;
- directions for use of the medicine as determined by the pharmacist;
- name and address of the authorised practitioner who last prescribed that medicine;
- date of supply;
- a unique reference number; and
- name of the pharmacist by whom the medicine was supplied.

The medicine must be labelled in the same way as any dispensed medicine.

Schedule 8 medicines are NOT included in the temporary special authority.

This authority is issued under Western Australian legislation and is separate to any Commonwealth instruments covering funding and claiming for PBS items during emergency supply. Pharmacists should ensure they are familiar with relevant PBS rules and [special authorities](#) at www.pbs.gov.au. See also PSA [Guidelines for the Continued Dispensing of eligible prescribed medicines by pharmacists](#)

Dispensing of Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 medicines using a 'digital image' of a paper-based prescription

Until 30 September 2021, pharmacists can dispense both Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 medicines if they have received a 'digital image' of a paper-based prescription from the prescriber. The prescriber does not have to provide the original paper-based prescription to the dispensing pharmacy for Schedule 4 medicines but must do so for Schedule 8 medicines. These arrangements are detailed in an authorisation issued under the *Public Health Act 2016*, available with [other COVID-19 health related directions on the WA Government website](#).

The Commonwealth has also allowed use of digital images of paper-based prescriptions for most PBS prescriptions. The PBS website should be consulted for more information on arrangements for PBS authority items and other matters.

From 1 October 2021, the rules for supply following an emergency direction from a prescriber will revert to the usual legislated emergency supply requirements.

Usual arrangements for dispensing of Schedule 4 and Schedule 8 medicines using telephone, emailed or faxed directions in an emergency

Under the usual emergency supply requirements, a pharmacist may supply a Schedule 4 or Schedule 8 medicine, in the absence of an original prescription, where they are in receipt of a:

- verbal direction from a prescriber; or
- electronic direction, such as a faxed or emailed copy of a prescription, from the prescriber.

In these cases, the prescriber must dispatch the written prescription to the pharmacy within 24 hours. Prescriptions for emergency supply must be sent directly to the pharmacy and not given to patients. [Further detail about the standard emergency arrangements](#) is available on the WA Health website.

Electronic prescriptions

The increasing uptake of electronic prescribing is likely to reduce the need for prescribers to utilise verbal, faxed or emailed directions to pharmacists. Electronic prescribing is particularly compatible with consultation via telehealth.

Updated April 2021 D-AA-21/144638 D00134

Version:	Last Updated:	Last reviewed:	Changes:
2.0	April 2021	April 2021	Updated content. Addition of version control and authority statement

Authority

Department of Health Western Australia.

These guidelines are for staff working in pharmacies in Western Australia. They are based on information available at the time of writing and may change as more information becomes available. These guidelines are a guide only and patients should be managed on a case-by-case basis.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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