

Information on medicines supply for the Public

What happens if there are medicine shortages?

The UK Government works closely with the NHS and suppliers to make sure medicines and medical products are available. Occasionally there are temporary shortages of specific medicines. This can be for a number of reasons – there may be problems in manufacturing or transporting the medicines for example.

If there is a shortage of any of your medicines, you will be prescribed the best alternative to your usual medication.

Why am I being offered a different medicine?

If your medicine is not available, you may be offered a different medicine to ensure you don't go without the medication you need. Alternatively, you may be given the same medicine but produced by a different manufacturer so your tablets may look different. If you have any concerns, speak to your pharmacist.

Why can't I get my medicine today?

If your pharmacy doesn't have all or some of your medicines in stock, the pharmacy team will discuss with you what this means. You may be able to get part of your prescription with the rest of your medicines being given to you at a later date. The pharmacist may contact other pharmacies to see if they have stock or speak to your GP about what other medicines could be prescribed.

Why can't I get my prescription from my usual pharmacy when another pharmacy has it?

Pharmacies use different suppliers and wholesalers so whether your usual pharmacy has your medicine in may depend on where they get their supplies and if their supplier has your medicines in stock. Sometimes a supplier will restrict the amount of a specific medicine a pharmacy can order so that stock is available for as many pharmacies as possible.

What can I do to help?

Order your medicines in plenty of time, but no more than 7 days before you need it. Only order medicines you need – if you have unused medicines at home (which have not expired – check the expiry date), use these first and don't order any extra.

Should I keep ordering my repeat prescriptions and taking my medicines as normal?

Yes. There is no need to change the way you order prescriptions or take your medicines. You do not need to order any more medicines than you need and it's important you keep taking your medicines as they have been prescribed by your doctor or other health professional.

If you order extra prescriptions, or stockpile, it will put pressure on stocks, meaning that some people may not get the medicines they need.

Should I ask my GP for a larger or longer prescription?

No. GPs will continue to prescribe medicines and medical products as normal.

What is the Government doing to make sure medicines and medical products will be available if there's a no-deal EU exit?

The UK Government is responsible for making sure medicines continue to be available. There are arrangements already in place to manage medicines shortages and these will be used for any shortage caused by EU exit.

As well as working with the UK Government to make sure these arrangements apply to Wales, the Welsh Government has been working closely with the NHS, pharmaceutical companies, suppliers of medical devices, and supply chains to make sure medicines and medical products continue to be available in the event of a no deal EU exit.

Preparations have included requesting all pharmaceutical companies that supply prescription-only medicines and pharmacy medicines to the UK, that come from or through, the EU or European Economic Area (EEA) to ensure they have extra stocks available in the UK prior to 31 October 2019.

So there will be enough space available for extra stocks of medicines and medical products, the UK Government is providing extra warehouse space. The UK Government has also put in place extra shipping for suppliers to use including space on ferries to Poole, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Immingham and Felixstowe. Medicines and medical products will be prioritised on these routes.

Will I still be able to get my prescription medicines and medical products after EU exit?

Yes. If there are any shortages of medicines after EU exit, your doctor or pharmacist will advise you of the best alternative to treat your condition, as they would for any medicine shortage. This may be a different brand of medicine or perhaps a lower strength medicine which will be made up to the same dose.

What medicines will be in short supply?

The NHS in Wales and the Welsh Government will be monitoring the medicines and medical products supply chain very carefully and will use well-established mechanisms to deal with supply issues if they do arise.

What about over-the-counter medicines and medical products?

All medicines which need to be prescribed or can only be bought from a pharmacy are included in the stockpiling plans. The plans do not include other medicines which are more widely available, for example those that can be purchased from supermarkets and garages, as there are many alternatives should these be in short supply.

What about blood and blood products?

Some medicines come from blood plasma such as immunoglobulin, albumin, and clotting factors. These are licensed medicines so they are included in the medicine supply plans to ensure ongoing supply.

In most cases the United Kingdom does not generally export or import these products.

What about vaccines?

Public Health Wales (PHW) keeps a good stockpile of vaccines for our national immunisation programme. It is working closely with vaccine suppliers to make sure these existing stockpiles continue in the event of any supply disruption in the UK.

Supplies of seasonal flu vaccine should not be affected by Brexit as stocks will have been brought into the UK before 31 October.