

# Medicines shortage guidance

Colleagues will be aware that there is a contractual requirement for medicines and appliances ordered on NHS prescriptions to be dispensed with reasonable promptness by community pharmacies and other dispensing contractors. We do have an unprecedented number of medicines in short supply however.

Staff working in primary care (both in general practice and community pharmacy) are often working under considerable pressure and we are aware that liaison between the two teams in relation to out of stock medicines has caused frequent operational difficulties with patient care, and frustration for all parties


If dispensing contractors are struggling to obtain products for less than the Drug Tariff price, they should notify the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee so that they can advocate on their behalf to get a price concession from the Department of Health & Social Care to ensure that pharmacies are not dispensing at a loss.  
<http://psnc.org.uk/dispensing-supply/supply-chain/supply-issues-feedback/>


If a prescribed medicine is out of stock, ensure all options to help the patient get their treatment have been considered before contacting the prescriber. If the prescribing practice is contacted to discuss an alternative, let practice staff know when the item prescribed will be back in stock (see overleaf) and which potential alternatives are in stock to avoid having to go through the process twice.


**The next page lists recommendations of actions to take when trying to source a prescribed medicine.** Please ensure staff are familiar with Standard Operating Procedures for owing dispensed items and sourcing stock - this guidance is not a substitute for those.


*Note that the [MHRA](#) advise that wholesale of medication can take place without a license if supply is on an occasional basis, the quantity of medicines supplied is small, is on a not for profit basis, and the supply is not for onward wholesale distribution.*

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- Check whether all pack sizes and all brands of the medication are out of stock with all wholesalers, and take note of any alternative strengths that are in stock
  - Call the wholesalers by telephone and ask when they expect to receive stock. They may also be aware of stock that your automated ordering system did not attempt to order.

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- Contact another pharmacy nearby to ask if they have any stock available, or can obtain stock.
  - If they do have stock, and the patient is waiting, ask the patient if they would prefer to take their prescription to that pharmacy, or prefer to wait until you obtain stock from the other pharmacy

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- If the medicine is only marketed by a single company (e.g. if protected by patent) contact the *manufacturer* and ask when the medication will be back in stock with wholesalers. If manufacturers are holding stock they will usually wholesale directly to the pharmacy to meet the needs of a specific patient urgently. For further information see <https://psnc.org.uk/dispensing-supply/supply-chain/manufacture-contingency-arrangements/>

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- If the steps above are unsuccessful ask the patient if they would like their prescription returned to them, or whether they would like you to contact the GP to arrange for an alternative to be prescribed. In some cases, a patient may prefer to wait if the medication is not required urgently (e.g. if they have some medication at home)