

Guidance on Expiry Dates for Medicines in Use in Care Homes

As part of good medicines management, people must always receive medication that is 'in date'

- to ensure that the active ingredients are fully effective
- to reduce the risk of contamination
- to ensure that it is safe to use

The expiry date (use by date) for any medication is calculated by the manufacturer and it is a legal requirement for it to be printed on the original container from the manufacturer. The date can also be found on the individual strips of tablets/capsules in boxes, on the label of bottles, and crimped into the end of tubes of creams/ointments.

Repackaging any medicine into a blister pack or bottle may mean that it cannot be used for as long as it would if kept in the original manufacturer's container. If medication is received in a pharmacy container e.g. amber bottle or white cardboard box, the supplying pharmacy should provide an expiry date on the item. This will make administering and carrying forward the item safer.

Reasons why medication may go 'out of date'

- Inefficient prescribing or re-ordering systems
- Stockpiling
- Receiving excessive quantities
- Poor stock rotation and not checking expiry dates

These will all add to the waste of limited NHS resources. It is estimated that unused medicines cost the NHS £300 million a year with £50 million of this is disposed of by care homes alone. Waste can never be fully eliminated, but we can all work together to minimise it.

Monitored dosage systems (MDS)

Not all medication can be put into an MDS, as not all are stable enough to be transferred from the manufacturer's original pack into any form of blister system. The community pharmacy or GP dispensary will advise you about which medicines cannot be re-dispensed into MDS.

When required (PRN) medicines

NICE Guideline Managing Medicines in Care Homes 2014 states:

- Care home staff (registered nurses and social care practitioners working in care homes) should ensure that 'when required' medicines are kept in their original packaging.
- Can be carried forward each month following the expiry guidance as provided.
- Should be stock rotated to ensure that the oldest medicines are used first.
- Must NOT be returned/disposed of and re-ordered each month, as this is unnecessary, time consuming and wasteful.

Before staff request prescriptions each month:

- Check the physical current stock levels of medication – only order if there is insufficient quantity to fulfil the next medication cycle.
- Some residents may need a medication review if doses are not taken regularly – ask the GP or Pharmacist to review if it is still needed, or to prescribe smaller quantities.
- Excess prescription quantities may need a review of the amount supplied – contact the Care Home Medicines Support Line or GP to revise to current needs.

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For All Medication: Check Manufacturer's Expiry Date on product first – the expiry date refers to the last day of the month.

Medication	Unopened: stored following manufacturer's guidance	Expiry date once opened	Comments
Tablets & capsules in original blister strips or container with printed expiry date	Manufacturer's expiry date	Follow guidance in Patient Information Leaflet (PIL)	PRN (when required) medication, wherever possible, should be used from the manufacturer's original pack. The expiry date is printed on each strip. Medicines kept for use in next month should be recorded in the 'carried forward' section of the MAR chart.
Loose tablets & capsules Re-dispensed from original pack without a printed expiry date.	Follow guidance from dispensing Pharmacy or GP dispensary – ensure an expiry date is provided by pharmacy	Follow guidance from dispensing Pharmacy or GP dispensary – ensure an expiry date is provided by pharmacy	
Tablets & capsules re-dispensed into Monitored Dosage System (MDS)	As labelled by the dispensing pharmacy or GP dispensary	As labelled by the dispensing pharmacy or GP dispensary	This may be printed on the back of the blister pack or label.
Oral Liquids in original pack	Manufacturer's expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL	Estimate the amount of any liquids carried over. Medicines retained for use should be recorded in the 'carried forward' section of the MAR chart.
Oral liquids re-dispensed into pharmacy bottle	Follow guidance from dispensing Pharmacy or GP dispensary – ensure an expiry date is provided by pharmacy	Follow guidance from dispensing Pharmacy or GP dispensary – ensure an expiry date is provided by pharmacy	
Creams/Ointments	Manufacturer's expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL	Write the DATE when opened on the dispensing label so the expiry date can be calculated.
Eye drops/ointment	Manufacturer's expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL NB some preparations may be used for up to 6 months	
External liquids (e.g. Lotions, shampoos & bath oils)	Manufacturer's expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL	
Ear drops	Manufacturer's expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL	
Nose drops/sprays	Manufacturer's expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL	
Inhalers	Manufacturer's expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL	If inhalers/sprays are used on a PRN basis, keep for on-going use, do not routinely re-order each month. Write details on current MAR chart.
Glyceryl trinitrate sprays	Manufacturer's expiry date	Manufacturer's expiry date	
Insulins	Manufacturer's expiry date when stored in a fridge at temperature between 2°C and 8°C	When in use can be kept at normal room temperature (i.e. less than 25°C) for 1 month	One pen/cartridge will often be sufficient per month. (A box of 5 will rarely be needed every month.) Ask the GP to prescribe the nearest number of pens/cartridges needed per month to reduce stock.

For support, please contact the Care Home Medicines Optimisation Team on 0300 303 0227 or Email: cwibb.carehomessupport@nhs.net