

Refrigerated medicines

Aim: To outline the controls that should be in place to ensure safe storage of medicines that require refrigeration.

Note: Care homes are required to have a policy for storing fridge medicines.

Monitoring fridge temperatures

The four 'Rs' of fridge temperature monitoring

Read: read temperatures at least daily using a thermometer that measures minimum and maximum temperature.

Record: record temperatures on a fridge temperature record sheet or other suitable alternative.

Reset: reset the thermometer after each temperature reading.

React: react by taking action if temperature is outside 2°C to 8°C and, document this action.

Fridge requirements

- Medicines that need to be refrigerated (e.g. insulin), should be stored in a separate, secure, fridge that is only used for medicines (do not keep any food or pathology samples in 'medicines fridge').
- The fridge must either be locked or kept in a locked medicines room. Staff should be aware of key storage and access.
- When medicines requiring refrigeration are received within the care home they should be immediately identified and placed in the 'medicines fridge'.
- Check that the designated fridge electrical wall socket is clearly labelled to leave on so that it is not inadvertently switched off. Some pharmaceutical fridges are directly wired so that this cannot occur.
- All fridges where medicines are stored must be serviced at least annually.
- Store medicines in an orderly fashion on the shelves, not on the floor of the fridge, or in the door. Avoid overfilling and keep a space between boxes and vials for air circulation. Do not keep large amounts of medicines in the fridge, this can lead to inadequate air flow and potential freezing. Medicines should not touch the sides of the fridge or the cooling plate at the back of the fridge.
- Specialised refrigerators are available for the storage of pharmaceutical products and must be used for vaccines and diluents. Vaccines must not be stored in domestic refrigerators.
- Ensure medicines stored in the fridge are regularly date checked and the stock rotated.
- All fridges should be cleaned as part of the general cleaning rota and dated records kept. Domestic fridges (that are not self-defrosting) should be defrosted regularly and dated records kept. The care home policy should state where the fridge contents should be refrigerated whilst cleaning and defrosting takes place.

Thermometer requirements

The 'medicines fridge' must be monitored using a thermometer which measures both the minimum and maximum temperature. The thermometer, or its temperature monitoring probes, should be sited in a central location within the fridge, preferably between the products - they should not be placed in the door.

Daily temperature recording

- The fridge temperature must be checked and recorded daily. It is recommended that the minimum and maximum temperatures and the current temperature are all recorded. (See [fridge temperature monitoring record](#)).
- The fridge temperature must be kept between the range of 2°C and 8°C. If the fridge temperature is outside of this range, action must be taken immediately - see below for required actions.
- Staff taking fridge temperature readings must demonstrate understanding of how to read and reset the thermometer, and why this is necessary.

What to do when the fridge temperature is out of range

- Inform the care home manager immediately.
- Quarantine (separate and put in a safe place) the affected fridge stock by bagging and labelling 'not for use' and keep within a designated fridge, ideally an alternative medicines fridge, while advice is sought. If the home does not have an alternative medicines fridge, the quarantined stock should be placed in a sealable container and placed in the kitchen fridge whilst advice is sought.
- Attach a notice to the fridge clearly stating 'do not use'.
- Estimate how many hours the fridge has been out of range (you should have the reading from the previous day's check).
- Contact your pharmacy for advice.
- If you are advised that the stock is no longer usable, ensure that it is disposed of promptly in line with local protocols.
- Contact the GP to explain what has happened and request replacement medicines, if required.
- If necessary, call out an engineer to repair the fridge.
- Remember to record the action taken on the fridge temperature record sheet.
- Ensure that it is clear where medicines should be stored (in an emergency) if the fridge malfunctions.