

Managing medicines shortages in Wales

Information for patients

What are medicines shortages?

Over 80 million prescriptions are issued in Wales every year, and most of those medicines are supplied without problems. But sometimes the UK's supply of a medicine fails to meet our demand for it. As a result, there may be a **shortage in the supply of specific medicines**.

Shortages may disrupt your regular medicine supply, which can be stressful and upsetting. We know how important it is for you to get your medicines on time. Across the NHS in Wales, many people are working hard to limit any shortages of your medicine supplies. As a result, **most shortages do not affect supply to patients**.

Why do medicines shortages happen?

Shortages can be caused by factors such as:

- unexpected increase in demand
- issues with manufacturing
- issues with distributing or transporting
- a manufacturer stops making a medicine
- unpredicted major events or disasters.

What happens in Wales when there are medicines shortages?

If there are shortages, Welsh Government and the NHS work with the Medicines Shortage Advisory Group Wales, the UK Government, manufacturers, and suppliers of medicines. They aim to make sure shortages do not disrupt supply.

However, when shortages might disrupt supply, Welsh Government tells healthcare workers who prescribe, supply and provide medicines:

- how long the shortage is expected to last
- what other versions of the same medicine do not have a shortage
- what other medicines treat the same condition and may be prescribed instead.

What if my medicine is in short supply?

You might:

- have to wait slightly longer to get your medicine
- be asked to visit a different pharmacy, if possible



- have your medicine supplied in a smaller quantity, and so supplied more often
- have your usual medicine supplied in a different container
- have to be prescribed a different medicine
- be given a different medicine by your pharmacy. Sometimes this will have already been instructed through national guidance called a Serious Shortage Protocol.

Any change made to your medicine, should be agreed with you as the option that is best in your particular circumstances.

If you are prescribed a different medicine, you will be told how to take it, and for how long you are likely to be taking it. Often you will be able to return to your usual medicine when the shortage is over. But sometimes you will need to continue on your new medicine.

If you are not sure if anything is different about your medicine, ask your pharmacist, doctor, dentist, nurse, or other healthcare worker.

In rare cases, there might be no suitable alternative medicine available. If this happens your healthcare worker will explain what the next steps are for you.

Who can I ask about the supply of my medicines?

Ask your pharmacist, doctor, dentist, nurse or other healthcare worker if you have any questions about the supply of your medicine. They can give you the best advice for you. Sometimes, if a specialist such as a hospital consultant has prescribed your medicine, they might need to be contacted.

What can I do to help limit the impact of medicines shortages?

There are several actions that we can all take.

- Only order medicines that you need – do not stock up on medicines.
- Order your medicines in plenty of time, because they might take longer to arrive than usual.
- Regularly check the expiry dates of your medicines, because these might be shorter than usual.
- Continue to take your medicines as prescribed for you – do not change how much you take unless advised to do so.