

Antibiotic Alert

National Shortage of Oral Cefalexin

This alert provides information for SA Health staff regarding the national shortage of oral cefalexin and provides guidance from the SA expert Advisory Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (SAAGAR) for addressing this shortage.

Cefalexin is a moderately broad spectrum antibiotic active against Gram-positive and some Gram-negative bacteria.

Summary of issues

Multiple strengths and presentations of oral cefalexin (capsules and oral suspensions) are currently in short supply due to a manufacturing issue.

Addressing the shortage of cefalexin

- > To assist with timely access for patients prescribed cefalexin, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has made a Serious Scarcity Substitution Instrument (SSSI): [Therapeutic Goods \(Serious Scarcity and Substitutable Medicine\) \(Cefalexin\) Instrument 2022](#). The SSSI allows pharmacists to substitute specified cefalexin products, with another cefalexin medicine, under permitted circumstances without prior approval from the prescriber. More information about the SSSI can be found on the TGA website: [Substitution allowed to address shortage of cefalexin](#).
- > Section 19A stock may be available for some products. More information is available on the TGA's [Section 19A approvals database](#).
- > Prescribers should continue to follow best practice prescribing for antibiotics but be aware that patients may be offered a substitute cefalexin product by the pharmacist. Prescribers are encouraged to not change prescribing practice to second-line or broader spectrum antibiotics without a clear clinical indication for doing so.

Key stewardship points

- > Consider if cefalexin is the recommended choice for your patient for their clinical indication. Cefalexin is rarely a first-line antimicrobial in clinical guidelines (it may be used in susceptible infections in patients with mild or moderate penicillin allergy – [see penicillin and cephalosporin allergies](#) for further information).
- > The Hospital National Antimicrobial Prescribing Survey (NAPS) showed that in 2019, 41.5% of cefalexin prescribed in Australian hospitals was deemed inappropriate.
- > If cefalexin is unavailable, consider whether a penicillin antibiotic is an appropriate choice for your patient. If a penicillin is not an appropriate option (e.g., allergy), consult with Clinical Microbiology or Infectious Diseases to discuss a suitable alternative.

References:

1. Antibiotic Expert Groups, Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotic. Version 16 (online), Melbourne: Therapeutic Guidelines Limited. Accessed 29 December 2022.
2. Therapeutic Goods Administration, Department of Health. Australian Government. <https://www.tga.gov.au>.
3. Australian Medicines Handbook Pty Ltd. <https://amhonline.amh.net.au/> 2020 edition. Accessed 04 January 2023.

For more information

**Antimicrobial Programs
Communicable Disease Control Branch
Department for Health and Wellbeing
Telephone: 7425 7169
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/antimicrobials**



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses>



Government
of South Australia

SA Health