

Health Professionals fact sheet

Supply of a medicine using an image based prescription (COVID-19)

SA Health continues to support a number of temporary changes to medicines regulation to ensure Australians can access the medicines they need as the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic continues. One of these measures relates to the supply of a Schedule 4 (S4) medicine using an image based prescription.

Supply of a Schedule 4 medicine using an image based prescription – the PBS Special Arrangement

The Commonwealth's [National Health \(COVID-19 Supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits\) Special Arrangement 2020](#) (the Special Arrangement), originally in place until 30 September 2020, has been extended to **31 March 2021**. The Special Arrangement makes temporary provisions to enable convenient supply of medicines listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) to patients prescribed these as the result of a Medicare telehealth attendance, introduced as a temporary measure in response to the impact of risk of human coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Special Arrangement means pharmacists can claim PBS payment for eligible Schedule 4 (S4) prescriptions dispensed using a digital image of the prescription instead of the original written prescription.

To support this measure, a temporary authorisation (now in place until 31 March 2021) has been made in South Australia to enable the lawful supply of S4 medicines on the basis of an image based prescription.

Prescribers must comply with all requirements of the authorisation/notice (updated and published in the SA Government Gazette on 1 October 2020) which include that they must provide the digital image of the prescription directly to the pharmacist **and not to the patient**, and that the **prescriber must keep the original prescription for two years**.

Pharmacists are still expected to ask patients to acknowledge receipt of the pharmaceutical benefit where it is practical to do so; however pharmacists are not required to sign on the patient's behalf.

How is this authorised in South Australia?

In South Australia, the legal form of a prescription is the written or electronic prescription. A digital image of a prescription, such as a photograph of the prescription sent as an image in a text message, or an email containing the prescription would not be the legal form and the prescriber would be required to send the original prescription to the pharmacist.

However, to support telehealth arrangements during COVID-19, an authorisation has been made which recognises a digital image of a prescription as an *approved electronic communication* under Regulation 33(2)(c) of the *Controlled Substances (Poisons) Regulations 2011* (Poisons Regulations). The authorisation has recently been extended until 30 March 2021 in line with the Commonwealth's extension of the Special Arrangement.

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The authorisation enables the Special Arrangement to apply in South Australia and also applies to prescribers who give image based prescriptions for non-PBS medicines.

What is a digital image of a prescription?

A digital image of a prescription means an unaltered photo image of the original prescription or an unaltered photo image of a copy of the original prescription. For example, the prescriber may send the digital image of the prescription to the pharmacist via:

- > Email or text message containing an original photograph of the prescription
- > Email or text message containing a PDF of the original prescription

The digital image of the prescription must be sent directly to the pharmacy; prescribers should check with the patient's pharmacy about how they would like to receive a digital image of the prescription.

The prescription can only be for a patient prescribed a S4 medicine as a result of a telehealth attendance or phone attendance.

Pharmacists should be satisfied of the bona fides of the prescription including that it has been written and sent by an authorised prescriber.

Which drugs cannot be prescribed using a digital image of a prescription?

Drugs listed in **Schedule 8 (S8)** of the [Poisons Standard](#), which includes opioids, stimulants and medicinal cannabis cannot be prescribed using a digital image of a prescription.

S4 drugs listed in Appendix D of the Poisons Standard are also excluded. S4 drugs listed in Appendix D include clozapine, benzodiazepines and hydroxychloroquine.

Faxed prescriptions

There are existing separate provisions under Regulation 33(9) of the [Poisons Regulations](#) for a prescription given by fax, which have long been in place in South Australia.

If the prescription is given to a pharmacist by fax, the prescriber is required to forward the original prescription to the pharmacist; as soon as practicable if the prescription is for a S4 drug, or within 24 hours if the prescription is for a drug of dependence.

However, provided the prescriber has endorsed the fax prescription with **the name and address of the single pharmacy that may dispense the prescription, the requirement to forward the original prescription does not apply.**

Do prescribers need to sign the prescription?

A prescriber who writes a prescription for the supply of a drug must date and sign the prescription per Regulation 34(1) of the Poisons Regulations.

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Authority prescriptions

The Special Arrangement applies to authority prescriptions and the usual inclusion of authority codes and notifications apply. What about repeats?

Repeat prescriptions

If repeats have been prescribed, the pharmacist may create a repeat authorisation and attach it to a print out of the digital image of the prescription, however the Special Arrangement rules indicate that the repeat should be held in the same pharmacy for subsequent supply.

Further information

- For PBS information in relation to sending an image of a paper prescription go to: <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/electronic-prescribing> or contact the Commonwealth Department of Health via email: pbs@health.gov.au or telephone 132 290.
- To read the authorisation in South Australia, go to the gazettal notice published on 1 October 2020 at <https://governmentgazette.sa.gov.au>
- For the latest updates about coronavirus disease in South Australia go to www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019

For more information

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