

Health Professionals fact sheet

Emergency Supply of essential medicines and COVID-19

A temporary Emergency Supply provision is in place to support consumers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to access their essential medicines from a pharmacist without a prescription, when there is an immediate need and they are unable to obtain a prescription.

Emergency supply of medicine without a prescription

The Minister for Health and Wellbeing has made provisions Under Regulation 21 of South Australia's [Controlled Substances \(Poisons\) Regulations 2011](#) (the Poisons Regulations) to enable pharmacists to dispense an emergency supply of essential medicines without a prescription. These provisions are to support consumers to access their medicines when they are unable to obtain a prescription, for example where there may be reduced access to medical services due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Emergency Supply provision is currently in place for the period of time that the declaration of a major emergency remains in force under the *South Australian Emergency Management Act 2004*, or until further notice.

The notice relating to the Emergency Supply provision for COVID-19 was published in the [South Australian Government Gazette](#) on 27 March 2019.

When can the Emergency Supply provision be used?

As per existing legislation for emergency supply of Schedule 4 Prescription Only (S4) medicines, the pharmacist must use their professional judgement and be satisfied there is an immediate need and:

- > the person for whom it is to be supplied is being medically treated with the drug; and
- > the continued supply of that drug is essential to the health of that person; and
- > there is good reason for the person's inability to produce a prescription for the drug.

Pharmacists must record the information required under the regulations for the emergency supply of S4 drugs.

What can pharmacists dispense?

Under the Emergency Supply provision a pharmacist may dispense:

- > for drugs that are on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) – no more than the standard PBS maximum quantity; or

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- > for drugs that are not on the PBS - the quantity that is contained in the smallest standard pack in which the drug is generally available.

Who can pharmacists supply to?

The Emergency Supply provision is available to South Australians who have an immediate need AND they are unable to access a prescription for their essential medicines, for example a person who has run out, or will run out of their essential medicines before they can obtain a prescription due to impacts of the coronavirus on their regular GP or health service.

Pharmacists need to ensure the requirements for dispensing under the Poisons Regulations are met, including confirming that the person has an immediate need for the medicine and cannot obtain a prescription from a prescriber due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Are there drugs that cannot be supplied under the Emergency Supply provision?

The Emergency Supply provision does not apply to certain drugs including:

- > Schedule 8 drugs (S8) including opioids, some benzodiazepines and stimulants
- > Drugs that are restricted to prescribing by relevant specialist medical practitioners only including:
 - drugs listed in Regulation 19 of the Poisons Regulations and
 - drugs listed in Appendix D of the Poisons Standard.
 - The above categories include medicines such as certain fertility and cancer drugs and hydroxychloroquine.

Maintaining supplies of medicines during COVID-19

Access to medicines is critical, particularly during difficult circumstances such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. In order to ensure fair and equitable access, pharmacists are required to apply limits on dispensing and sales of certain prescription and over-the-counter medicines, and may apply limits to other relevant products. The limits apply to classes of medicines for which unavailability or an interruption to treatment could cause significant health impacts, or that are expected to be needed in greater quantity during this pandemic.

The Commonwealth TGA announced [COVID-19 limits on dispensing and sales at pharmacies](#) on 19 March 2020 in response to wholesalers reporting numerous product lines being out of stock. Pharmacists are required to limit dispensing of certain prescription medicines to a one-month supply at the prescribed dose, and sales of certain over-the-counter medicines to a maximum of one unit per purchase.

Prescribers and pharmacists should also avoid prescribing or dispensing multiple months of supply of prescription medicines to patients where there is no clinical need to do so.

In addition, a variation to the Poisons Standard was introduced with [new requirements for initiation of hydroxychloroquine and over the counter supplies of salbutamol](#) (e.g. Ventolin® or Asmol®).

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Other emergency supply provisions under South Australian legislation

Existing emergency supply provisions in the Poisons Regulations remain in place. These allow pharmacists to provide up to 3 day's supply of a patient's medicine, or if the medicine is a cream, ointment or packed liquid, the smallest standard manufactured pack size may be dispensed in the absence of a prescription:

Pharmacists may also supply a medicine from a telephone, fax or other form of electronic order from a prescriber provided the prescriber sends a written prescription as soon as practicable, or within 24 hours for S8 drugs (Controlled Drugs).

Expanded Commonwealth PBS Continued Dispensing Arrangements

The Commonwealth Government has temporarily expanded its PBS Continued Dispensing Arrangements which complement South Australia's Emergency Supply provision. Continued Dispensing Arrangements allow people affected by the coronavirus pandemic to access their essential medicines at the usual PBS cost. These arrangements are in place until 30 June 2020. For further information about the PBS Continued Dispensing Arrangements go to www.PBS.gov.au.

Further information – Professional guidelines

Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA):

- > [Guidelines for the continued dispensing of eligible prescribed medicines by pharmacists](#)

Further information about COVID-19

For the latest updates about coronavirus disease in South Australia go to www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019 or contact the National Coronavirus Helpline on telephone 1800 020 080.

For more information

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