

Emergency supply of prescription only medicines by pharmacists during bushfires - Information for pharmacists

A temporary Standing Order has been issued by the ACT Chief Health Officer, Dr Kerryn Coleman to enable supply of designated prescription only medicines by pharmacists without a prescription, to support people directly or indirectly affected by the bushfire crisis in NSW and other states.

The standing order is effectively an extension of the current ACT emergency supply provisions, which enables pharmacists to give a full PBS pack quantity or smallest standard pack size of a medicine without a prescription where there is an immediate need.

The order applies to all prescription only medicines with the exception of anabolic steroids, designated Appendix D medicines and benzodiazepines. Controlled (schedule 8) medicines are also not permitted under the order. The order is in place from 9 January 2020 until 31 March 2020 unless revoked earlier.

The Australian Government has also enabled medicines supplied by pharmacists without a prescription to be claimed as a PBS subsidy under an extension of [Continued Dispensing arrangements](#) in response to the bushfire crisis. The PBS Continued Dispensing arrangements have immediate effect in the ACT and are in place until 31 March 2020.

Further information on conditions for Continued Dispensing see [Minister Hunt's announcement](#).

The ACT standing order is very similar to a special authority issued by NSW Health and public health emergency order issued in Victoria in January 2020 in response to the bushfires. In addition, the ACT standing order includes record keeping and labelling requirements equivalent to the current ACT emergency supply provisions.

The decision to instate the ACT standing order has been made in response to reported demand from ACT pharmacists, in order to support them provide care for patients either directly or indirectly impacted by bushfires in the surrounding region and ensure patients have continued access to their essential medicines where it is impracticable for them to see a doctor.

ACT Health has been working closely with the ACT branches of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and Pharmacy Guild of Australia in developing this response.

Key requirements for pharmacists

Medical practitioners remain the first point of referral for pharmacists where a patient has lost or is unable to access their prescribed medicines.

A pharmacist may supply a designated prescription only (schedule 4) medicine if satisfied that:

- the person is undergoing treatment essential to the person's well-being,
- the medicine has previously been prescribed for the treatment,
- the person is in immediate need of the medicine for continuation of the treatment, and
- it is not practicable for the person to obtain a prescription for the medicine from an authorised practitioner.

A designated prescription only medicine may only be supplied if the quantity supplied is no more than:

- for a medicine that is on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), the standard PBS maximum quantity, or
- for a medicine that is not on the PBS, the quantity that is contained in the smallest standard pack in which the medicine is generally available.

The temporary standing order applies to designated prescription only medicines only.

A designated prescription only medicine means a prescription only (schedule 4) medicines other than:

- an anabolic steroid, and
- a designated appendix D medicine, and
- a benzodiazepine.

Controlled (schedule 8) medicines are not permitted under the standing order.

Record keeping

A record of the following information is to be retained:

- the pharmacist's name,
- the name of the prescriber who would ordinarily have prescribed the medicine,
- the patient's name and address,
- the date the medicine is supplied,
- the medicine's approved name and brand name, and
- the form, strength and quantity of the medicine.

Labelling

The supplied medicine must have a label that includes the following information:

- the name of the person to whom the medicine is to be supplied,
- the date the medicine is supplied,

- the medicine, and the form, strength and quantity of the medicine, supplied;
- if the package of the dispensed medicine is not a manufacturer's pack—
 - the batch number or numbers of the medicine, and
 - the relevant expiry date for the medicine
- the pharmacy name, business address and telephone number,
- the initials or other identification of the pharmacist supplying the medicine,
- directions about the use of the medicine that are adequate to allow the medicine to be taken or administered safely, including any warning statement in the medicines and poisons standard, appendix K (Drugs required to be labelled with a sedation warning) applying to the medicine,
- words to the effect of 'keep out of reach of children'.

Other options available to pharmacists

Other options are available to pharmacists to supply prescription only medicines to patients where they are unable to obtain a valid prescription. These include:

- 1. Telephone or faxed 'owing' prescriptions** – these are permitted in the ACT where possible to obtain from a prescriber. The original of a telephone or faxed prescription must be sent to the pharmacy within 7 days to meet ACT legal requirements and enable PBS reimbursement.

Key questions by pharmacists

Will PBS medicines be subsidised under these temporary arrangements?

Yes. Some medicines may be subsidised by the PBS if the supply meets the requirements of the Continued Dispensing scheme. The temporary changes to PBS Continued Dispensing arrangements will allow pharmacists to give patients up to one month's supply of the PBS listed medicine, without a script, once in a twelve-month period. Further information on Continued Dispensing arrangements can be accessed on the PBS website www.pbs.gov.au.

Medicines that are not subsidised under the PBS will need to be paid for privately by the patient. Costs associated with supply of the medicine is at the discretion of pharmacists and business owners. Some people may be able to claim for reimbursement under their private health insurance.

How do I record emergency supply in my pharmacy dispensing system?

All pharmacies use different dispensing systems. Please contact your pharmacy dispensing system provider if you are unsure. It is recommended you clearly record in your system and on the patient's medicine label that the supply is an 'Emergency supply'.

What if my patient no longer has a permanent address?

It is permissible to record a temporary address if the person's residence has, or is suspected to have been impacted by fires.

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