



# Changes to rules for prescriptions during COVID-19

Temporary, special arrangements have now been put into place in Western Australia to assist prescribers and pharmacists better manage prescriptions during COVID-19. These changes have been implemented to support introduction of more telehealth consultations and manage times when patients in isolation are unable to attend a medical appointment in person to receive a prescription. The special arrangements are in place until 30 September 2020.

In addition to these changes, State and Commonwealth Governments are seeking to fast track electronic prescribing (e-prescribing) solutions. When secure e-prescribing is available, this will take over from the special arrangements.

## What are the changes?

Usually your doctor or prescriber must provide a hard copy prescription for you to take to a pharmacy. Current laws only allow a pharmacist to dispense a medicine when they have received the original paper prescription. In some emergency circumstances, the doctor can instruct the pharmacist to supply straight away and then send the original prescription to be received later.

As it is not very practical for a doctor to post large numbers of prescriptions to different pharmacies, changes have been made to allow the use of digital images. The changes extend and modify these emergency circumstances, but there are still a number of conditions that prescribers and pharmacists must follow in these cases.

## Will I get a paper prescription?

If your doctor sends a digital image direct to your pharmacy, then you will not get a paper prescription. This prescription can only be dispensed by the pharmacy that received the image.

If there are repeats ordered on the prescription, then these must be stored at the pharmacy that received the image. The repeats can only be dispensed by that pharmacy.

## Does this apply to all prescription medicines?

The changes cover all prescription medicines.

In the case of controlled drugs, the doctor or prescriber can send a digital image, but must send the original prescription to the pharmacy at a later time. They will now have longer to send the original.

## How do I get a telehealth service if I can't leave my house?

Doctors, nurses and mental health professionals can deliver bulk-billed services via telehealth until 30 September 2020 via phone or video conferencing.

More information on telehealth can be found at:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-national-health-plan-supporting-telehealth-consultations>

### **How do I get a prescription in a telehealth consultation?**

Your doctor still needs to create a paper prescription. They can send an image of the prescription direct to your preferred pharmacy. Once the pharmacy has received the image they can supply the medicine to you.

### **How do I get my medicines if I'm confined to home?**

If your doctor has sent an image to your pharmacy, you should contact the pharmacy to arrange for supply. Your pharmacy can post or deliver the medicines to the address on your prescription and discuss payment arrangements. Alternatively, you can choose to nominate a friend or family member to collect your prescription in person.

### **How do I fill an existing prescription or repeat if I am confined to my home?**

If you have an existing paper prescription or repeat, and are confined to your home, to obtain supplies of your medicine the pharmacy will still need to receive the original prescription. You should contact your pharmacy to see what individual arrangements they have available to assist.

### **Can a patient use a digital image for a prescription?**

The changes only apply to doctors and prescribers transmitting and receiving digital images. The pharmacist is not able to supply medicines using a digital image provided by a patient. This means that unless the digital image comes directly from the prescriber the pharmacist must first obtain the original paper prescription before dispensing. This applies under both State and Commonwealth laws.

### **I don't have a telehealth consultation or a prescription, but I need urgent medicines?**

Pharmacists can already supply prescription medicines in emergencies, under some circumstances. Additional special arrangements have already been put into place to assist supply of medicines in an emergency. This only applies to medicines that you are already taking for a chronic condition, and only where you can't get to the doctor. You should contact your own pharmacy for more information. Depending on the situation, your pharmacist may still advise that it is best for your care to have a medical consultation.

### **Do I need to sign my prescription?**

Under the interim arrangements, patients are not required to sign prescriptions to acknowledge receipt of medicines.

### **What if I still want to receive my prescriptions myself?**

If you prefer, you can request that your doctor or prescriber sends the paper prescription to you in the mail.

If you choose to do this then your doctor will not send a digital image to your pharmacy. You will need to give the pharmacy the hard copy original of your prescription as normal, before they are permitted to supply your medicines.

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