



Ensuring access to your medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic it is important to keep taking your medicines as usual to stay as healthy as possible. It is also important to have your influenza (flu) vaccination as soon as possible this year.

This fact sheet provides general advice on accessing the medicines you need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this time, if you experience any problems in obtaining new supplies of medicines contact your pharmacist or doctor.

Be prepared – check your medicines and prescriptions:

Check that you have enough of your medicines at home; about one month's supply is generally recommended. Having more than a month's supply comes with safety risks and extra costs.

Important reasons not to stockpile medicines include:

- The medicines, doses and strengths of medicines you need can change over time. Medicines you stockpile now may not be needed for you later and may go to waste.
- Medicines expire. If you keep too many at home, they may sit in your cupboard for a long time, and before you know it, they may have passed their expiry date.
- Having multiple packs at home containing the same medicine may cause confusion and make it more likely to accidentally double dose on a medicine, which can be harmful. Make sure you know the active ingredient in each of the medicines you are taking.
- Having more medicines in the house increases the risk of them falling into the wrong hands. A child or pet may accidentally take them and have dangerous effects.
- Buying extra medicines can involve extra financial costs.

How can I get a new prescription for my medicines if I'm staying at home?

- Contact your doctor and/or pharmacy to discuss the options available.
- Your doctor may be able to issue a new prescription without the need to see or speak to you or they may suggest a telehealth consultation which means talking to your doctor over the phone about what you need.
- Your pharmacist may be able to suggest ways that you can obtain your prescribed medicines if you are unable to see your doctor (see below).

How can I get my medicines without going out to the doctor's surgery or to the pharmacy?

There are several options available for you to receive your medicines without the need to leave your home.

Ordering new medicines from the pharmacy

- Your pharmacy may already have your repeat prescriptions on file in which case you can ring them to reorder what you need.
- During the COVID-19 crisis your doctor may be able to send your prescription or following a telehealth consultation, a digital image of your prescription, directly to your pharmacy. Ask your doctor about this service. See further information about [digital image prescriptions](#).
- If you do not have a current prescription for your regular medicines, there are new arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic which mean that your pharmacist may be able to provide you with a one-month supply of prescribed medicines if the treatment is urgent without the need to see a doctor. See further information about [continued dispensing](#).
- Ask someone to assist – for example a family member, friend or neighbour who can take your prescriptions to the pharmacy and collect your medicines for you (see below).
- You can also post your prescriptions to the pharmacy or drop them off via a secure method (e.g. into a secure letterbox).

Getting your medicines from the pharmacy

- Home Delivery Services – Talk to your pharmacy about getting your medicines delivered free-of-charge to your home or to wherever you are staying. Deliveries may be made by a pharmacy staff member, Australia Post mail, couriers, or taxi services.
- Ask someone to assist – A family member, friend or neighbour may collect your medicines from the pharmacy. The person collecting may need to provide your Medicare card details, and any concession/DVA card details, if you have one, to confirm your identification and payment details. The person collecting may be asked for personal identification.

Can I still go to the pharmacy to get my medicines?

- Pharmacies are essential services and will remain open to provide medicines and advice to the community.
- If you are older or have health problems that make you vulnerable to infection it may be safer for you to stay at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- You may wish to contact the pharmacy by phone or email if you need to discuss your medicines supply and to consider options to minimise in-person visits where possible.

You should NOT attend a pharmacy if you:

- have been diagnosed with COVID-19
- have been tested for COVID-19 and are in self-isolation awaiting results
- are in quarantine or isolation due to travel or close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case
- are unwell with COVID-19 symptoms
- are at greater risk from COVID-19 (for example if you are aged over 70 or if you have other conditions that mean you are vulnerable to infections).

Consider instead contacting the pharmacy by phone or email to discuss other arrangements for getting your medicines.

Medicines shortages

Shortages of medicines, including over-the-counter and prescription medicines, occur when supplies of medicines from the pharmaceutical companies do not keep up with the demand for them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacists are required to assist in ensuring medicines are available to everyone by limiting the supply of some prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines to one pack or supply at a time.

If a shortage of a medicine occurs, doctors and pharmacists may need to find different ways to ensure that you obtain your essential medicine requirements.

This may mean that your pharmacist substitutes your usual medicine with:

- a different brand that contains the same active ingredient
- a lower or higher strength of your medicine to be taken at an equivalent dose
- a different form of your medicine for example capsules instead of tablets.

If no other substitutions can be found, there may be a need to consult your doctor to discuss an alternative to the medicine that is unavailable.

See more information about [Therapeutic Goods Administration \(TGA\) consumer information about medicine shortages](#).

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