

3. Emergency Supply of a Prescription Only Medicine

3.1. Service summary

In certain conditions, pharmacists can supply Prescription Only Medicines (other than Schedule 2 & 3 Controlled Drugs) without a prescription. It is for the pharmacist to decide whether it is appropriate to make the supply.

Emergency supply at the request of a patient

The pharmacist must be satisfied, through direct discussion with the patient, that there is an immediate need for the medicine and it is not practical to obtain a prescription. The patient must have used the medicine before. This is not an NHS service and a charge will be levied which will include the cost of the medicine. The regulations limit the maximum length of treatment which in most cases is 30 days, although the pharmacist will often consider it appropriate to supply less than this.

Emergency supply at the request of a prescriber

The pharmacist must be satisfied as to the identity of the prescriber and that there is an emergency which means a prescription cannot be provided immediately. Requests can be made in person or by telephone (and see faxed prescriptions below). A prescription charge will be levied unless the patient is exempt. The prescriber must ensure that the pharmacist receives a prescription within 72 hours.

3.2. Getting the most from the service

Faxed prescriptions

A faxed prescription is not legally valid. The pharmacy may prepare the medicine on receipt of a fax, but shouldn't supply it in advance of receiving the original prescription. The legal mechanism for supplying a POM without the original prescription is the emergency supply. Practices should discuss with their local pharmacies the process for dealing with emergencies. It may be that a fax is accepted as a request for an emergency supply, in which case the prescriber is obliged to supply the original within 72 hours. Pharmacists shouldn't be expected to dispense against faxes as a matter of routine.

Out of hours

Patients who contact out of hours services because they have run out of medicines could be referred to their pharmacy where they can request an emergency supply, on the understanding that it is up to the pharmacist to decide whether to make the supply and that there will be a charge. New medicines cannot be initiated via this route.

Temporary residents

If someone approaches the practice for an emergency prescription, for example because they are visiting the area and have forgotten their medication, it may be appropriate to refer them to the local pharmacy with the same provisos as above. New medicines cannot be initiated via this route.

3.3. For more information

BNF section '[Emergency supply of medicines](#)' (Page 7 in BNF 65).