

Caring for CareHomes

Storage and expiry dates

Medicines should be stored in a way that means they are safe and will be effective when administered. All medicines have expiry and storage requirements that are specified by the manufacturer.

The **expiry date** of a drug is the point in time when a medication is no longer within an acceptable condition to be considered effective.

All medicines will have **storage** requirements that are specified by the manufacturer and are included on their Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). It is important these requirements are met to ensure that the medicines remain effective and safe to use.



Key points for storage

- Keep all medication in the original container in which they were dispensed.
- Keep medicines in original outer packaging, to protect from sunlight.
- Medicines should be stored in a cool (below 25°C) dry place unless refrigeration is required (between 2°C and 8°C)
- Store all medication as recommended by the manufacturer.
- It is recommended good practice to check and record the temperature of storage locations at least once a week, and more frequently if high or low temperature is suspected.
- If you suspect that a medication has been stored outside of the specified temperature range, contact your community pharmacist as soon as possible for advice.
- Medications stored under the responsibility of staff must be stored in a locked designated room or area only accessible to authorised care home staff. This also includes access to the keys or keycode.
- Residents who have their own medication and self-administer should store the medication as identified in their risk assessment (for example, in a lockable cupboard or drawer in a resident's room). Medicines can be kept on their person if this does not place other residents at risk.

Storing medication

- It is important to note and act on any specific storage instructions, e.g. fridge items, controlled drugs.
- Emergency medicines should be stored safely and securely, though in a manner that means they can be accessed quickly when needed.
- Rotate stock so the earliest expiry is at the front and therefore will be used first.
- Surplus stock should be stored in a cupboard big enough to allow individual residents' medication to be grouped together.
- Set up a monthly reminder or system to check all expiry dates.
- Any external medication should be kept in a separate locked cupboard or shelf, or in the resident's own room (in a securely locked place).

Expiry after opening

- Certain preparations have a shorter shelf life once they have been opened, e.g. Dipyridamole Modified Release (MR) capsules, some liquids, eye drops, ointments and creams.
- The date opened should be written on the label or container and the 'use by date' calculated. If appropriate this can be recorded on the separate Topical Medication Application Record Sheet.
- Your community pharmacy may be able supply 'date opened' labels to attach to these medicines.

Examples of different wording of expiry dates:

Wording on packaging	Definition
Use before end of January 2020	Discard 31 st January 2020
Use by January 2020	Discard 31 st January 2020
Discard after January 2020	Discard 31 st January 2020
Expires January 2020	Discard 31 st January 2020
Use within one month of opening	Self-explanatory
Discard 7 days after opening	Self-explanatory

Table of suggested expiry of products from date of opening

Formulation and packing	Suggested 'use by date' after opening, unless otherwise stated by manufacturer, and still within manufacturer's expiry date	Rationale
Tablets and capsules in Monitored Dosage System (MDS)	As per expiry date on label or eight weeks from date on dispensing label	Check with your pharmacist or dispensary if you have any questions about this
Tablets, capsules and liquids decanted into pharmacy bottle	Seek community pharmacy or dispensary advice if not stated on dispensing label	Dependent on stability of product
Part pack of tablets and capsules remaining in manufacturer's blister pack dispensed in pharmacy box or in original pack	Manufacturer's expiry on blister. If no expiry visible, contact community pharmacy or dispensary for advice	Closed container, contents not openly exposed to environment. If no visible expiry, there is a risk that product may have expired
Oral liquids in original container	Six months unless otherwise specified by manufacturer, remember to mark date of opening on container	Exposure of liquid to environment when dose is measured can introduce contamination
Eye, ear, nose drops and ointments	One month, unless otherwise stated by manufacturer	Manufacturer's recommendation
Inhalers	Manufacturer's expiry	Closed container, contents not openly exposed to environment
Insulin	Four weeks for insulin vials and pens unless otherwise stated	The sterile seal has been broken and may be stored outside the fridge

Important: Any product whose appearance suggests it may be unfit for use should be discarded irrespective of expiry date.

If there is any doubt, contact the community pharmacy or dispensary for advice. Be aware of the expiry date of PRN medications (when required), especially if they are not used frequently.

Monitored Dose Systems (MDS)

It is recommended that medicines dispensed in a MDS are discarded after 8 weeks, unless otherwise specified. Please note that not all medicines are suitable for inclusion in MDS, for example:

- There is stability data available which indicates that the medication is not suitable for inclusion in MDS, e.g. Sodium Valproate.
- Medicines that may be harmful when handled, e.g. cytotoxic products like methotrexate
- Medicines that are sensitive to moisture, e.g. effervescent tablets
- Light sensitive medicines, e.g. chlorpromazine
- Medicines where the dose may vary depending on test results, e.g. warfarin
- When required (PRN) medicines that are not taken regularly

Effects of using expired stock

- The active drug becomes chemically unstable
- The effectiveness of the drug may change
- The breakdown of the drug may be toxic and harmful to the resident
- Increased risk of contamination

Disposing of medication

Medicines do not have to be (should not automatically be) discarded at the end of every monthly cycle. To prevent waste, before disposing of medicines, care home staff should check:

- Is the medicine still prescribed for the resident?
- Is it still within its' expiry date?
- If the container has been opened, is it still within its 'use by date'?

If the answer is 'yes' to all these questions, then the medication can continue to be used.