



## CARE HOME GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

## Expiry Dates and Storage duration for Medicines in Care Homes (with or without nursing)

There is often confusion around required expiry dates of medicines within care homes. This has led to issues with patient safety and significant medicines waste. In the absence of national guidance for all products, these recommendations aim to improve patient safety, reduce wastage and support appropriate medicine use in care homes.

**As part of good medicines management, patients should receive medication that is “in date” to:**

- Ensure that the active ingredients are fully effective.
- Reduce the risk of contamination.
- Ensure that it is safe to use.

The expiry date (or use by date) for any medication is calculated by the manufacturer and it is a legal requirement for it to be printed on the manufacturer’s original container.

**Medicines may go “out of date” or “expire” because of:**

- Inefficient prescribing or re-ordering systems.
- Stockpiling.
- Receiving excessive quantities.
- Poor stock rotation and not checking expiry dates (staff receiving the medicines should ensure the community pharmacist provides a batch number and expiry date on any medicines packed down from bulk containers).
- Bottles containing liquids have been open for longer than advised by the manufacturer (see below).

**When required (PRN) medicines**

Medicines are a precious resource. Care homes should ensure that medicines are used safely and efficiently, by only ordering what is required and therefore reducing medicines waste. See LIMOS guidance “Supporting guidance for the safe use of ‘when required medicines’ (PRN) in care homes” for further information. NICE Guideline SC1 Managing medicines in care homes states that “when required” medicines:

- Should be kept in their original packaging by Care home staff (registered nurses and social care practitioners working in care homes)
- Can be carried forward each month following the expiry guidance as given on page 2 of this document.
- Quantities should be carried over to the next month’s MAR chart to complete the audit trail
- Should be stock rotated to ensure that the medicines with the shortest expiry are used first.
- Must NOT be returned and re-ordered each month but total quantity carried over to the next month –“medicines should be added to the MAR chart each month unless stopped by the prescriber. Care Homes should agree a clear pathway for communication with the pharmacy to enable this to happen.

**Key points for basic storage conditions**

- Keep all medication in the original container in which they were dispensed to protect from sunlight.
- Medicines should only be used for the person for whom it was prescribed, unless it is homely remedy stock or being used as part of the agreed medicines re-use scheme.
- All medicines should be stored in a cool (below 25°C) dry place unless refrigeration is required (between 2°C and 8°C) – fridge temperatures should be recorded daily and a documented process should be in place should the temperature fall out of range. See LIMOS guidance ‘Flow chart for monitoring fridge temperatures in care homes’ for further information.
- The expiry date of the product can change once opened; any change required will be written on the manufacturers pack. Record the date opened and the calculated expiry on the medicine package/label. Store as recommended by the

manufacturer and be vigilant with product expiry date. Seek advice from the LIMOS Care Home Team on 07557815978 (Monday to Friday) / email [lewccg.limos@nhs.net](mailto:lewccg.limos@nhs.net) or your Community Pharmacy, if medicines are found to have been stored outside their intended conditions or if the dispensing label becomes illegible e.g. on creams etc. Do not discard on this basis alone.

**Before ordering each month a care home nominated member of staff (or their deputy) should:**

- **Check the current stock levels of medication**, especially items which are not supplied in individually packed multi-compartment aids or stored on the medicines trolley.
- **Refer residents to LIMOS/GP for a medication review**, if their medication needs to be changed or they require support with their medicines e.g. they develop swallowing problems and may need to change the formulation of their medication or resident is near end of life.
- **Report excessive quantities returned regularly** – ask LIMOS/GP to review if a specific medicine is still needed, or to prescribe smaller quantities.

Formulation	Recommend expiry date
Tablets and capsules packed into Multi-Compartment Aid (MCA) or Monitored Dosing System (MDS)	2 months from date of dispensing or as printed on the back of the blister pack. There may be exceptions but the community pharmacist should make the care home aware either by providing medication with shorter expiry dates outside the blister or including it within the blister but clearly labelling it as a shorter dated medication/blister pack
Tablets and capsules – in original blister/foil pack	Manufacturer's expiry date (Do not mix batches and only order when necessary)
Tablets and capsules – loose i.e. put into a bottle by the pharmacy	1 year from the dispensing date or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter
Liquids (internal i.e. swallowed)	6 months from date of opening or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter – mark date of opening on container
Liquids (external i.e. applied on the outside of the body)	6 months from date of opening or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter – mark date of opening on container
Ointment/creams in tubes	3 months from date of opening or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter. For unopened creams follow the manufacturer's expiry date
Ointments/creams in tubs with lid	3 months from date of opening or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter. For unopened creams follow the manufacturer's expiry date
Ointment/creams with a pump dispenser	Manufacturer's expiry date
Suppositories/pessaries/rectal tubes/patches	Manufacturer's expiry date
Inhalers	Manufacturer's expiry date. Do not order routinely each month if used on a PRN basis
Ear/nose drops	Discard 3 months after opening unless manufacturer advises other wise
Eye drops	Discard 1 month after opening unless manufacturer advises other wise
Injections (except insulin)	Manufacturer's recommendation
Insulin	Insulin should be stored in the fridge 2°- 8°C and can be kept unopened until the expiry date. During use, Insulin should be stored below 25°C and kept according to manufacturer's recommendation once removed from the fridge. The majority of insulin's have 28 days expiry but some have 6 weeks e.g. some insulin Flexpens –ensure you check manufacturer's recommendations.



Some products now show an expiry date symbol e.g.  However in the care home setting where storage conditions may be variable it is recommended that the suggested expiry dates above are followed.

Ensure the Summary of Product Characteristics for any specific preparation are checked regularly in case there are any updated developments which may affect this guidance <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/>

**Acknowledgements**

This guidance was adapted from Herefordshire CCG - Guidance on the Expiry Dates and Storage of Medicine in Care Homes (with or without nursing) January 2019