

## Good Practice Guidelines for Care Homes

### Expiry dates of medicinal products after opening

#### Aim

The aim of these Good Practice Guidelines is to support safer use of medicinal products which can be subject to reduced quality once opened, as well as reduce wastage. The guidelines are intended for use primarily by care home staff but can also be useful for those involved in the care of residents of nursing and residential care homes e.g. District Nurses, Care Home Support Service (CHSS).

#### What is an expiry date?

Expiry date is the date beyond which a product can no longer be used. A pharmaceutical product that is within its expiry date is considered to be safe and effective, provided it's in the original container, in an unopened condition and has been stored according to the manufacturer's instructions.

#### Consequences 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 patient
- Increased risk of contamination

#### Key points:

- All medication should be stored in the original container in which it was received.
- All medicines should be stored according to manufacturer's instructions. Most medicines should be stored in a cool (below 25°C), dry place, away from sunlight. Some medicines must be stored in a designated medicines fridge at a temperature between 2 and 8°C. Care homes must have a policy for monitoring and maintaining appropriate storage conditions.
- Each pharmaceutical product has an expiry date stated on the packaging.
- The expiry date of medicinal products can change once opened. Care homes should record the date of opening and the new calculated expiry date on all products subject to reduced shelf-life once opened (see Table 1 for guidance on calculating the new expiry date).
- Expiry dates of medicines should be checked regularly and at least monthly. Care homes should monitor and review quantities of prescribed medicines to avoid waste.

#### 'In use' expiry dates

Some manufacturers specify how long a product can be safely used once opened. There is much debate about expiry dates of pharmaceutical products that are 'in use' where the manufacturers do not provide specific advice. In the absence of definitive guidance on 'in

use' expiry periods for these products, the following practical timescales are generally advised (unless other guidance e.g. local infection control guidance states otherwise).

**Table 1. Expiry dates after opening/'In use' expiry dates\***

<b>Formulation and packaging</b>	<b>Suggested expiry once opened**</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Tablets and capsules in the original container	Manufacturer's expiry date	
Tablets and capsules in patient compliance aids/ monitored dosage system (MDS)	8 weeks unless otherwise stated by the pharmacy	Limited stability data when packaged into MDS
Loose tablets and capsules i.e. dispensed into a bottle by the pharmacy	6 months from the date of dispensing unless otherwise stated by the pharmacy	
Liquids (internal)	6 months from date of opening unless otherwise stated by the manufacturer or pharmacy	To reduce the risk of contamination, any decanted, unused liquid should be disposed of and not returned to the container Stock balance of liquids should be routinely performed by a visual check
Liquids (external)	6 months from date of opening unless otherwise stated by the manufacturer or pharmacy	
Ointments and creams in tubes	3 months from the date of opening	
Ointments and creams in tubs with a lid (open top containers)	3 months from the date of opening	To reduce the risk of contamination, a clean spoon or spatula should be used to remove the required amount from the container
Ointments and creams in a pump dispenser	6 months from the date of opening	
Inhalers	Manufacturer's expiry date	Some inhalers have reduced expiry when stored at room temperature – always check manufacturer information
Eye /ear / nose drops and ointments	4 weeks from the date of opening unless otherwise stated by the manufacturer	
Ear / nose sprays	Manufacturer's expiry date	
Injections (except insulin)	Manufacturer's expiry date	
Insulin (pen / cartridge / vial)	4 weeks from the date of opening unless otherwise stated by the manufacturer	Once in use, can be stored at room temperature below 25°C

\*Any product, whose appearance suggests it is unfit for use e.g. an obvious damage to the container or contamination, irrespective of expiry date should be discarded as per local policy.

\*\*If either the manufacturer's expiry date or the manufacturer's specified 'in use' expiry is shorter, this takes priority over the general guidance above.

## Labelling products with 'in-use' expiry date

It is good practice to record the date of opening and the calculated expiry date on products subject to reduced shelf-life once opened. The dates should be clearly marked as 'date opened' and 'expiry date', and written on the container itself (e.g. bottle, tube, pen) as well as the outer packaging i.e. carton (it is good practice to retain the outer packaging and the Patient Information Leaflet included). Inexpensive labels can be purchased for the purpose.

## Reducing wastage

Care home staff should regularly assess the suitability of currently used and prescribed medication, and only re-order if a product has reached its expiry date (manufacturer's expiry date or 'in use' expiry date as specified above), or there's insufficient quantity to meet resident's needs. Medicines should only be disposed of if they are no longer required by the resident or are unsuitable for use e.g. expired, damaged, inappropriately stored etc. It is good practice for external preparations and 'when required' medicines to be prescribed in quantities that will be used within three months from dispensing to avoid wasteful disposal of unused medication.

## Storage of medicines

Each care home provider must have a clear process for storing medicines safely within the home. The process should include:

- how and where medicines are stored, including medicines supplied in monitored dosage systems, controlled drugs, medicines to be stored in the refrigerator, skin products, oral nutritional supplements, appliances,
- secure storage with access for authorised care home staff only,
- the temperatures for storing medicines and how the storage conditions should be monitored.

Care home residents should be able to take and look after their medicines themselves if they choose. A risk assessment should be completed to verify whether the person is safe and has the capacity and dexterity to do so, and the decision should be reviewed regularly. When self-administered, medicinal products must be stored safely in a resident's room as identified in the individual risk assessment (unless special storage requirements apply). Care home providers must have a process in place for the assessment of suitability of products which are self-administered by residents and stored in residents' rooms.

## References

CQC website. External medicines such as creams and patches.

<https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/adult-social-care/external-medicines-such-creams-patches> accessed on 22/04/21

Electronic Medicines Compendium (EMC). <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc> accessed on 22/04/21

NICE 2014. Social Care Guideline SC1: Managing medicines in care homes.

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/sc1/chapter/1-Recommendations> accessed on 22/04/21

Church C, Smith J. How stable are medicines moved from original packs into compliance aids? Pharm J. 2006;276(7384):75–81

PrescQIPP 2020. Bulletin 240: Care homes: Emollients and barrier preparations.

<https://prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-240-care-homes-emollients/> accessed on 22/04/21

Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group. Good Practice Guidance on Expiry Dates of Medicines.

<http://www.rotherhamccg.nhs.uk/Downloads/Top%20Tips%20and%20Therapeutic%20Guidelines/Rotherham%20CCG%20good%20practice%20guidance%20on%20expiry%20dates%20of%20medicines.pdf>

RPS 2013. Improving patient outcomes: The better use of multi-compartment compliance aids.

<https://www.rpharms.com/Portals/0/RPS%20document%20library/Open%20access/Support/toolkit/rps-mca-july-2013.pdf>

Telford and Wrekin Clinical Commissioning Group. Expiry Date of Medication after Opening (2019). <https://www.telfordccg.nhs.uk/your-health/medicines-management/care-homes/guidelines/6377-expiry-date-of-medication-after-opening-1/file>

North of England Commissioning Support Unit. Good Practice – Medication Expiry Dates (2020). <https://medicines.necu.nhs.uk/necu-good-practice-guidance-and-tools-for-care-homes/> accessed on 22/04/21

Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. Good Practice Guidance Q: Guidance on the Expiry Dates and Storage of Medicines in Care Homes (with or without nursing).

<https://www.oxfordshireccg.nhs.uk/professional-resources/documents/guidance-for-care-homes/OCCG-Good-practice-guidance-Q-Guidance-on-the-expiry-dates-and-storage-of-medicines-in-care-homes-v2.pdf>