

## Supply of key medicines used during the winter season

### Important information for Healthcare Professionals and Patients

06 December 2023

Dear Healthcare Professional,

As you will know, medicine shortages continue to be a feature of both the global and the Irish markets. We recognise that medicine shortages can be challenging for patients, healthcare professionals and their teams, and that shortages can be particularly evident during the winter months. We acknowledge your commitment to maintaining high standards of patient care and recognise the efforts being made to ensure continuity of supply for patients. This message aims to provide reassurance about the availability of key medicines used during the winter season, and the efforts being taken to monitor this availability on an ongoing basis.

#### **What efforts are being taken to minimise medicine shortages for the winter season?**

At a European level, the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) has been working closely with other EU Member States, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and the European Commission to prepare for the winter season. HPRA are monitoring the supply situation and taking appropriate actions to minimise shortages. Specifically, the pharmaceutical industry has been requested to review the estimated supplies of medicines, including antibiotics, for the winter season. Based on analysis of data from previous years, **the pharmaceutical industry expects that the supply of key medicines used during the winter season will meet the anticipated demand.**

#### **What other efforts are being taken in Ireland to mitigate the impact of medicine shortages?**

The Department of Health (DoH), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the HPRA are committed to working with other stakeholders, including the pharmaceutical industry, wholesalers and pharmacists together with medical and pharmacy regulators to monitor the supply of medicines to Ireland to anticipate and respond to, in so far as is possible, any potential vulnerabilities in medicines supply.

At a national level, the HPRA oversees a multi-stakeholder [Medicine Shortages Framework](#) intended to address the issue of human medicine shortages in Ireland. The aim of the framework is to:

- Help avoid potential shortages from occurring in the first place.
- Reduce the impact on patients when shortages do occur.

#### **Actions to avoid disruption to the supply of medicines**

Continuity of supply and protection of public health must be everyone's priority. Therefore, to help reduce supply disruptions and prevent shortages this winter, we remind pharmacists not to order extra quantities of medicines, and only order stock required to meet current patient need.

Healthcare professionals also have an important role to play in educating and informing patients on the safe and rational use of medicines. Patients should be informed:

- To use antibiotics only when needed. In addition to contributing to shortages, inappropriate or overuse of antibiotics contributes to antimicrobial resistance.
- Many everyday illnesses like colds, coughs or sore throats don't need an antibiotic, and appropriate products and advice can be recommended to manage symptoms.
- Vaccines help boost protection and reduce the risk of serious illness. Information about COVID-19, flu and other vaccines available to adults and children is available on the [HSE website](#).

### **Where can we find further information on medicine shortages?**

The HPRA publish and maintains an up-to date list of medicines shortages impacting the Irish market on its [website](#). The information aims to help keep patients and healthcare professionals informed of current and resolved shortages.

The continued support and assistance of healthcare professionals in relaying clear and accurate information to the public to avoid disruption to the supply of medicines is recognised and appreciated.

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## **Advice for the public this winter**

A lot of everyday illnesses like colds, coughs or sore throats don't need an antibiotic. [The HSE has helpful advice](#) on how to treat these illnesses at home and when to get help.

Using antibiotics only when needed can help reduce supply disruptions and prevent shortages this winter. Inappropriate use or overuse of antibiotics also contributes to antimicrobial resistance.

Flu and COVID vaccines help boost protection and reduce the risk of serious illness. Information about COVID, flu and other vaccines available to adults and children is available at [Screenings and vaccinations - HSE.ie](#). Collectively, our actions can contribute to better public health this winter.

### **I am concerned about the availability of common medicines this winter.**

Pharmaceutical companies and wholesalers in Europe are responsible for ensuring a consistent supply of the medicines they sell. The supply of medicines is dynamic, and companies aim to predict demand, accounting for seasonal fluctuations. Based on analysis of data from previous years, the pharmaceutical industry expects that the supply of key medicines used during the winter season will meet the anticipated demand.

Using information provided by industry, the HPRA will continue monitoring the availability of key medicines throughout this Winter period. Should any issues be identified as a result, the potential shortage and mitigating actions will be coordinated through the Medicine Shortages Framework.

### **What if the medicine I am prescribed isn't available?**

In the case of medicines used most often in Ireland, including those used during winter, there are typically multiple forms, strengths, and brands available from various sources. If there are some supply issues for individual medicines, it is expected that alternative options will be available to ensure continuity of treatment.

## **Supply of key medicines used during the winter season**

### **Advice for the public *continued***

In cases like this your pharmacist can assist, sometimes directly, or alternatively in consultation with your doctor, depending on what suitable alternative products are available in the pharmacy.

Patients with any concerns about their medicine are encouraged to speak with their pharmacist or GP.

### **How can I confirm if a medicine is in short supply nationally?**

Pharmaceutical companies are required to report potential shortages notifications to the HPRA. The HPRA publish and maintains an up-to date list of medicines shortages impacting the Irish market on its [website](#).

### **Why are there shortages of common medicines?**

From time to time, there can be shortages of certain medicines. This can happen for a number of reasons. For example, increased and unexpected demand, or a production delay.

If your medicine is unavailable, your pharmacist can advise you on the best course of action, or they may contact your GP to discuss a suitable alternative medicine.

### **What is being done to prevent medicine shortages this winter?**

At a European level, the HPRA has also been working closely with other EU Member States, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and the European Commission to prepare for the winter season.

The HPRA, the HSE, the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI), Medical Council (MCIRL) and the Department of Health are ready to work together with clinical experts and other stakeholders to provide appropriate information and guidance where necessary regarding medicines shortages.

The HPRA is engaging closely with companies and wholesalers involved in the supply of key products. This is to closely monitor available stock and to keep the health system and the public informed.

### **Should I source my medicines online to ensure supply?**

The online supply of prescription medicines is illegal in Ireland.

You should only obtain your prescription medicines through a pharmacy. This way you know you are getting a medicine that contains the right ingredients and that is tailored to your specific needs under the supervision of a doctor or pharmacist.

The supply of 'Over the Counter' medicines can be obtained from online pharmacies which are registered with the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland. Check [here](#) to see if the online pharmacy you are looking to purchase from is registered.

**End**