

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

There is much confusion about the issue of expiry dates within care homes. This has led to issues with patient safety and the wastage of medication. National guidance is not available for all products and this guidance will improve patient safety; reduce wastage and support sensible medicine use in care homes.

Formulation	Recommended expiry date
Tablets and capsules packed in MDS	2 months
Tablets and capsules – in original blister/foil pack e.g. prn medicines	Manufacturer's expiry date
Tablets and capsules - loose i.e. put into a bottle by the pharmacy	Six months from the dispensing date or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter
Liquids (internal)	Six months from date of opening or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter
Liquids (external)	Six months from the date of opening or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter
Ointment / creams in tubes or with a pump dispenser	Six months from date of opening or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter. For unopened creams follow the manufacturer's expiry date
Ointment / creams in tubs with a lid	Three months from date of opening or manufacturer's recommendation where shorter. For unopened creams follow the manufacturer's expiry date
Suppositories / pessaries / rectal tubes / patches	Manufacturer's expiry date
Inhalers	Manufacturer's expiry date
Ear / nose drops and sprays	Discard three months after opening unless manufacturer advises other wise
Eye drops	Discard one month after opening
Injections (except insulin)	Manufacturer's recommendation
Insulin	Insulin should be stored in the fridge and can be kept unopened until the expiry date. Once opened it can be stored outside of the fridge for up to 28 days.

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Good Practice Guidance documents are believed to accurately reflect the literature at the time of writing. However, users should always consult the literature and take account of new developments because these may affect this guidance

General points on the use and storage of medicines:

- Preparations that have not been opened can be kept and used up to their expiry date. Once they are opened the above guidance will apply.
- All medicines should be stored in a cool (below 25°C), dry place, away from sunlight. Some medicines need to be kept refrigerated at a temperature between 2 and 8°C. Care homes should have a policy for monitoring temperatures in fridges and areas where medicines are stored.
- Every pharmaceutical product has an expiry date that is stated on the packaging. The use of the product past its expiry date may result in a lower active ingredient or changes to the product that may cause patient discomfort, for example, pH changes or a safety hazard due to microbiological contamination.
- It is a home's responsibility to ensure that the date of opening is recorded clearly on all liquids, creams, ointments, insulin, ear/eye/nose drops and nasal sprays. Expiry dates of all medicines should be checked on a monthly basis.
- Medication for PRN use should be prescribed in quantities that will be used within three months from dispensing to avoid wasteful returns of unused medication. Homes should only order PRN items when stocks will run out during the next month
- Before you request prescriptions for the coming month; check the current stock levels of medication, especially items which are not supplied in individually packed monitored dosage systems

Infection control best practice advice for the use of external preparations such as creams and ointments in all care homes includes:

- All creams should be used for a named resident only
- Expiry dates should be checked at each use
- Creams in pots should be discarded if contaminated or if the lid has been left off for any indeterminate period.

References

Joint Formulary Committee. *British National Formulary*. 64th ed. London: British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain; 2012.

Church C., Smith J., 2006. How stable are medicines moved from original packs into compliance aids? *The Pharmaceutical journal* 276; 75-81.

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