

## Guidance on Storage of Medicines and Expiry Dates

- **Storage of medicines**

All medicines should be stored in a cool (below 25°C), dry place, away from direct sunlight. Some medicines need to be kept refrigerated at a temperature of between 2 and 8°C. The conditions for storage are always stated on the packet or in the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). Care homes must have a policy for monitoring temperatures in fridges and areas where medicines are stored.

- **Guidelines for Medication Expiry**

Every pharmaceutical product has an expiry date that is stated on the packaging. The use of a product past its expiry date may result in a lower dose of active ingredient, altered bioavailability, patient discomfort or a safety hazard due to microbial contamination or toxic degradation products.

There has been much confusion in the past about the issue of expiry dates for medication within care homes. This has led to problems with patient safety and the excessive wastage of medication.

The NICE Managing Medicines in Care Homes guideline (March 2014) recognises “care home providers and health professionals may have adopted a number of system approaches to managing medicines that may in themselves create waste. For example care home staff returning tubs of topical preparations back to the supplying pharmacy every month and ordering new ones”. The guidance states that provided the medicine is still currently prescribed, is within its expiry date and the manufacturer’s literature does not specify a short shelf-life when the product is opened, there is no requirement for the medicine to be disposed of early and it should be carried forward to the next 28-day supply cycle. **Opened medicines can therefore be used up to the manufacturer’s recommended expiry date stated on the packaging of the medicine.**

Professional judgement must be used when deciding if a product is suitable for use. The stability (both chemical and microbiological) and the mode of use of a medicine must be considered.

**Preparations that have not been opened can be kept and used up until their manufacturer’s expiry date.**

***Products should not be put into the medicines waste unopened and then a new supply ordered! Think about the needs of the service user and discuss them with the GP and/or Community Pharmacist. You can help us make a difference and reduce the amount of medicines waste in the county.***

### **Summary of the guidance:**

Preparation	Unopened and stored in accordance with manufacturer’s guidance	Opened and stored in accordance with manufacturer’s guidance
Tablets & capsules in blister strips – where expiry date is in intact	Manufacturer’s expiry date	Manufacturer’s expiry date
Tablets & capsules – where in pharmacy bottle	Discuss with dispensing Pharmacy or GP Dispensary	Discuss with dispensing Pharmacy or GP Dispensary
Tablets & capsules – where in Monitored Dosage System	As labelled by the dispensing pharmacy/GP dispensary	As labelled by the dispensing pharmacy/GP dispensary
Liquids – where in original bottle	Manufacturer’s expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL
Liquids – where in pharmacy bottle	Discuss with dispensing Pharmacy or GP Dispensary	Discuss with dispensing Pharmacy or GP Dispensary
Creams	Manufacturer’s expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL
Ointments	Manufacturer’s expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL
Eye drops/ointment	Manufacturer’s expiry date	28 days or 6 months*
Ear drops	Manufacturer’s expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL
Nose drops/sprays	Manufacturer’s expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL
Inhalers	Manufacturer’s expiry date	Follow guidance in PIL
Insulins	Manufacturer’s expiry date, stored in the fridge	Currently in use, can be kept out of the fridge for 1 month

### **Tablets and Capsules**

These are unlikely to be harmful if taken after their expiry date, but the manufacturer cannot guarantee effectiveness beyond this date. Tablets and capsules in blister strips (in original packaging or white pharmacy cartons) with their manufacturer expiry dates intact can be kept up to that original date. For tablets and capsules dispensed in pharmacy medicine bottles, advice must be sought from the dispensing pharmacy/GP dispensary.

### **Tablets and Capsules packaged in a monitored dosage system**

If medicines are packaged in a MDS they will no longer be covered by the terms of their product licence. They should only be used up to the date as labelled by the dispensing pharmacy/GP dispensary

- Not all medicines can be packaged in a MDS.
- The pharmacist/dispenser should consider the suitability of the medicine for MDS since some medicines should only be stored in their original packaging.
- If controlled drugs (CD) are incorporated into an MDS then the whole box is subject to Misuse of Drugs (Safe Custody) Regulations.
- MDS systems should not be used for PRN medication as it can lead to increased wastage (this is emphasised in the NICE Guidance).

### **Oral Liquid Preparations**

Liquid medicines should never be taken after their date has expired. Bacteria may contaminate them, as the preservatives in them may have run out. Unopened liquids can be kept up to the manufacturer's expiry date if kept under the appropriate storage conditions.

Unless otherwise stated, the general guidance for opened products expiry dates is:

- Discard according to the manufacturer's recommendations after opening where original packs are used.
- Where liquids are supplied in pharmacy bottles, advice must be sought from the dispensing pharmacy/GP dispensary.

### **Topical Preparations**

Creams are water based and can become contaminated by bacteria, especially if stored in an open top tub. Creams can be assumed to last, and be effective, unopened up to the manufacturer's expiry date if stored under the appropriate conditions.

Ointments generally have a longer shelf life but can lose their softness and 'spreadability' if kept for long periods. They can be assumed to last, and to be effective, unopened up to the manufacturer's expiry date if stored under the appropriate conditions.

Unless labelled otherwise the general guidance for opened products is the manufacturer's expiry date on the packaging or in the PIL.

### **Eye Drops and Eye Ointments**

Unless stated otherwise the general guidance for expiry dates of these products is discard 28 days after opening. \*Some eye drops can now be used for up to 6 months after opening – check the PIL. The packs will also bear a manufacturer's expiry date that only applies if the product is sealed and stored under appropriate conditions.

There are about 20 drops in 1ml, usually one bottle is enough for 1 month's supply. However, some of the ocular lubricants have a longer expiry once opened. See table on page 3\*.

### **Ear Drops, Nose Drops and Nose Sprays**

If these products are sealed and stored under appropriate conditions, the manufacturer's expiry date on the packaging can be used. Once opened, follow the expiry date stated in the PIL.

**Inhalers**

Inhalers will keep for as long as the manufacturer's expiry date on the pack, as the medicine will be stored either in a pressurised canister or in a blister pack or capsule. Inhaler holders and spacers should be washed weekly or according to the manufacturer's instructions. A new spacer should be obtained at least every 12 months, but check the manufacturer's information.

**Insulins**

Insulin cartridges and vials must be stored in the fridge when not in use and can be kept for as long as the manufacturer's expiry date on the packaging. The insulin being used by a person can be kept out of the fridge for up to 1 month. Write on the packaging the date on which it was removed from the fridge so this can be monitored.

There are many different types of insulin and administering devices, check with the manufacturer or the PIL for details.

**Shorter expiry dates**

Certain preparations have a shorter manufacturer's expiry date once they have been opened. The following list is not exhaustive and is only intended to cover some of the most frequently used products. Please add your own products as they become known to you. Many specials will have a short shelf life. See the PIL or contact the manufacturer for further information.

Item	Shelf life once opened
Citalopram drops	16 weeks
Oramorph 10mg/5ml Liquid	90 days
Risperdal 1mg/ml Liquid	90 days
Asasantin Retard Capsules	6 weeks
Persantin Retard Capsules	6 weeks
Neoral Oral Solution 100mg/ml	2 months

**Longer expiry dates**

Optive and Optive Plus eye drops	6 months
VitA-Pos eye ointment	6 months (oil based, tube contains 300 applications )
Hylo tear and Hylo Forte ocular devices	6 months as device design is pump action

**It is the responsibility of the care home to have policies in place to ensure that:**

- The date of opening is recorded clearly on insulins, eye/ear/nose drops, eye ointments and nose sprays.
- Expiry dates are checked every time before use.
- Storage temperatures of medicines rooms and fridges are monitored and recorded daily. Any deviation from the required range must be acted upon immediately by staff.
- Home staff should only order PRN items when stocks will run out during the next month.
- Use of PRN medication should be closely monitored by the home staff so that excess stock is not ordered but that the person does not run out within the 28 day cycle. The home should liaise with the GP to order appropriate quantities of PRN medication based on usage levels.
- PRN medications should be reviewed at least every 6 months.
- Prescribed medication is the property of the service user.
- **Care home staff must NOT routinely dispose of all medication at the end of each month if it is appropriate to carry forward.**
- **Care home staff must NOT dispose of unopened medicines and reorder new supplies.**