

In Use Expiry Dates for Dispensed Medicines A Short Reference Guide for Care Homes

NICE SC1 Managing Medicines in Care Homes states that as long as the medicine is still currently prescribed, is still within its expiry date and that 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.

If in doubt check the expiry date of the medicine at <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc>.

Manufacturers Expiry Dates	What does this mean?
'Use before'	Use before the beginning of the month e.g. Use before May = Use before 1st May
'Expiry date'	Expires at the end of the Month e.g. Expiry date June = Expires on 30th June
'Use by'	Use by the end of the month e.g. Use by July = Use by 31st July

Record date of opening on all liquids, creams, ointments, insulin, ear/eye/nose drops, inhalers and nasal sprays. Also record altered expiry dates after opening on all items affected.

Type of medication	Shelf Life
Tablets and capsules	
Monitored Dose Supply (MDS) or 'dosette' box prepared tablets or capsules	Once dispensed into an MDS items are no longer covered by terms of product licence and will expire 8 weeks after dispensing. Not all medicines can be packed in a MDS. Confirm with pharmacy dispensing MDS.
Manufacturer's original container or packaging	Manufacturer's expiry date except where specified by manufacturer e.g. Nicorandil 30 days after opening
Dispensed into tablet bottle	6 months from dispensing unless otherwise specified
Internal or external liquids	
Manufacturer's original container	Manufacturer's expiry unless otherwise specified
Dispensed liquids	6 months from date of dispensing, unless otherwise stated, check dispensing label. Diluted internal liquids may have a shorter shelf-life
Specials or Unlicensed Liquids	Manufacturers expiry date, check storage conditions
Creams and ointments *See next page for further information	
Pump containers	Manufacturer's expiry unless otherwise specified
Pots (open containers) and tubes	Three months after opening. Follow infection control procedures
Aerosols, inhalers and nebulers	Manufacturer's expiry date unless otherwise specified.
Rectal preps and pessaries	Manufacturer's expiry date
Injections	
Ampoules	Single use only
Pre-filled syringes	Single use only
Vials	Majority are single use only. Must be patient specific. Refer to specific product information
Eye drops /ointments	28 days after opening unless otherwise specified. Preservative free or manufactured specials may have a shorter shelf life. Check storage conditions.
Ear drops / ointment	28 days after opening unless otherwise specified



In Use Expiry Dates of Creams and Ointments used in Care Homes

- All creams and ointments should be for single patient use only.
- Where applied by the carer, gloves and spatulas should be used.
- Packs in use should be stored in the patient's room.
- 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.
- Cosmetic products may have an expiry date and / or a 'period after opening' symbol plus duration of use. This information should be followed to determine expiry

General points on the use and storage of medicines:

- 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 and should contact their dispensing service provider pharmacy for advice if the temperature recorded is outside of the required range.
- 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 care 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 "when required" (PRN) use should be prescribed in quantities that will be used **within three months** from dispensing to avoid wasteful returns of unused medication. Care homes should only order PRN items when stocks will run out during the next month.
 - PRN medicines should be dispensed in their original packs whenever possible, to give the longest shelf life.
 - Remaining medicines can be carried forward each month provided they remain in date
 - Should be stock-rotated to ensure the oldest is used first
 - Must not be returned and re-ordered each 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.

References:

- Prescipp Bulletin 240: Care homes – Emollients and barrier preparations.
- Good practice guidance for care homes: Expiry dates for medication. Frimley Clinical Commissioning group MOCH team. April 2022.