

SERIOUS SHORTAGE PROTOCOLS

Patient Information - What do I need to know?

What is a Serious Shortage Protocol?

A Serious Shortage Protocol (SSP) is the name given to action taken if Government decides there is a significant shortage of a particular medicine or medical appliance that you use.

What does this mean for me?

It means your local community pharmacist can offer you, or your representative, for example, a suitable alternative medicine or appliance, or quantity of your medicine or appliance, to avoid unnecessary delay or the need for you to return to your doctor for a new prescription. Among the things that your community pharmacist can do is:

- *Provide you with a different dosage of the medicine (e.g. if you are normally prescribed 10 milligram tablets, you might be prescribed 5 milligram tablets and told to take two); or*
- *Provide a reduced quantity of the medicine (e.g. if you normally get a six-week supply, you might be given a four-week supply); or*
- *They may offer you a different medicine that has the same effect as the one originally prescribed; or*
- *Offer you a non-branded version of the medicine originally prescribed; or*
- *In the case of appliances (e.g. catheters, nebulisers), it may simply be a different product.*

Will an SSP mean I will continue to get a different type of medicine?

No. The SSP will only be used in exceptional circumstances and will only remain in place until supplies of the medicine or appliance you normally use have returned to normal levels.

Will my doctor be notified that I have had an alternative medicine or appliance supplied to me?

Your doctor will be advised when an SSP for a particular medicine or appliance is operational in Northern Ireland. If an alternative dose or reduced quantity of your normal medicine is supplied to you, the pharmacist is not required to inform your doctor. In certain cases your doctor will be informed by the community pharmacist when an alternative medicine or appliance has been supplied.

Is it safe for me to take the alternative medicine or appliance supplied to me?

The pharmacist will take great care to find out if you have had any previous adverse/allergic reaction to the alternative medicine or appliance they offer you. If appropriate, they may also speak to your doctor and, if your pharmacist feels the alternative medicine/appliance is not suitable, you will be referred back to your doctor.

What if I have an adverse reaction to the alternative medication?

All medicines carry a small risk of adverse reactions. Your pharmacist will inform you of any possible adverse effects and also advise you, as with all medications, to seek medical advice in the event of experiencing an adverse effect.

Do I have to accept the alternative medicine or appliance supplied to me?

No. It is entirely up to you. If you, or your parent/guardian or carer chooses not to accept the alternative, you can refuse it. You can contact your doctor and they will provide you with further advice and treatment options.

Are there situations when a pharmacist may decide not to make an immediate offer of an alternative medicine under a Serious Shortage Protocol?

Yes. The pharmacist may decide not to provide an alternative medicine if they feel they will be able to provide the prescribed medicine within a reasonable timescale. Alternatively, the pharmacist can advise you or your representative to return to your doctor for a review of the treatment. They may also be able to direct you to another community pharmacy which has stock of the originally prescribed medicine.

Where can I find further information on the alternative medicine or appliance dispensed to me?

Your pharmacist will provide you with information on the alternative medicine, especially in cases where it looks different or the quantity is different. They will also speak to you when offering an alternative appliance to explain things such as the need for different storage conditions. All medicines also contain a Patient Information Leaflet that will provide further details about the medication being supplied.

Will my prescription still be valid when my original medication becomes available?

Once an alternative medicine or appliance has been provided under an SSP, even if it is for a lesser quantity, the prescription for that item will be no longer valid and no further supply can be made against it. In order for you to receive further supplies of that medicine, you will need to go back to your doctor. If there are other items on the prescription which are not covered by the SSP, the pharmacist will be able to dispense these.

Remember, an SSP will only remain in place until adequate supplies of the medicine or appliance have been restored.