

PANDEMIC TRAINING FOR ADDITIONAL STAFF TO SUPPORT PHARMACY SERVICES

Protecting public health in the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak

Your workplace will already have measures in place to help reduce the risk of spreading the infection. This should include a sign displayed at the entrance to advise patients of what to do if they think they have symptoms of the coronavirus. They should not enter the pharmacy.



ACTIVITY

Check if your pharmacy has displayed a sign for this purpose. Public Health England has posters available for community pharmacies to download and display.

Recognising symptoms of COVID-19 infection

- **a new persistent cough**
- **fever**

People experiencing either or both of these symptoms should be advised to stay at home and self-isolate. At the time of writing (17 March 2020), the advice from Public Health England is that if someone in the same household has a cough or fever, everyone in the same household should self-isolate for 14 days. To check the latest advice, as it can change daily, please refer to the government website: [UK Government response](#)

Public Health England advises that people can self-isolate without calling **NHS 111**. However, if their symptoms get worse during home isolation or they feel worse after 7 days, they should call **NHS 111** for advice.

Hygiene

Good hygiene measures will help you to protect yourself and others. It is key to reducing the spread of the infection.

- **wash your hands frequently with soap and hot water**
- **cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and throw away the tissue immediately. Wash your hands or use a hand sanitiser immediately after this**
- **clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, e.g. the pharmacy counter, pens, card machines for payment (especially those with a PIN pad), keyboards and touchscreens**
- **you should try to maintain a distance of at least 2 meters (6 feet) between you and others**

Public Health England is planning to supply community pharmacies in England with personal protective equipment (PPE) packs including masks, aprons and gloves, to protect patient-facing staff in emergencies when they may be exposed to the coronavirus. You can find out more on this website: [PSNC](#)



ACTIVITY

Find out any other infection control measures in place in your pharmacy.

Working on the Pharmacy Counter

Before you start working on the pharmacy counter, you need to be trained to carry out tasks safely and effectively. This is key to protecting patient safety and confidentiality. In this section, we will look at your potential role of working on the pharmacy counter, as well as the rules and regulations that you must follow.

You must recognise the limits of your role and refer to a regular member of the pharmacy team whenever you are unsure.

Patient confidentiality

It is a legal requirement to protect patient data and confidentiality. This means that you should make sure conversations cannot be overheard by others.

You should not:

- **discuss patient details with anyone on the shop floor, whether colleagues, management, other health professionals or customers**
- **leave prescriptions lying around for others to see**

Patient data includes sensitive information that will let you identify a patient, such as their name, address and date of birth, as well as their medical information. When referring to the pharmacist, make sure sensitive information cannot be overheard by other people.



ACTIVITY

Find and read your organisational policy on patient confidentiality.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are a set of rules that details how a particular task should be carried out. It must be followed by all staff members who carry out that particular task. It helps to ensure the task is performed to the same standard regardless of who has carried it out.



ACTIVITY

Speak to your manager and find out which SOPs you need to read before you start working on the pharmacy counter. The relevant SOPs can include the tasks below so record the date when you have read them and keep this record safe.

SOP for Task	Date
Taking in prescriptions	
Handing out prescriptions	
Taking payment for prescription charges	
Sales of Medicines Protocol	
Handling pharmacy stock and related workplace health and safety	

Handling requests for medicines

Remember you should not give advice on medicines unless you have been adequately trained. All queries about medicines should be referred to the pharmacist, this includes requests for both over-the-counter medicines and queries about prescription medicines.

There are 3 different legal categories of medicines, each with different levels of regulations.

Legal category	Requirements for supply
GSL (General Sales List)	Available for self-selection, i.e. the public can access these medicines on the shelves in any shop, including pharmacies
P (Pharmacy)	Located behind the counter in a pharmacy and can only be sold under the supervision of a pharmacist
POM (Prescription-Only Medicines)	Only available on a valid prescription

You may receive requests for GSL and P medicines at the pharmacy counter. To tell the difference, the product packaging will state "P" or "GSL" in a box.

The 2WHAM questioning technique is often used to gather relevant information to help ensure patient safety when selling or advising patients about OTC medicines:

- **Who is it for?**
- **What are the symptoms?**
- **How long have you had the symptoms?**
- **Action already taken?**
- **Medicines taken for anything else?**

Although it may not be necessary to ask questions when selling GSL medicines, you should check whether the patient would like to speak to the pharmacist for advice. In general, most people can safely purchase OTC medicines for their own use if they have used it before, do not experience other symptoms and do not take other medicines.

If the patient asks you to recommend a product based on their symptoms, you can use the 2WHAM questions to gather the relevant information and refer to the pharmacist.

Responsible Pharmacist Regulations

The Responsible Pharmacist Regulations allows the pharmacist to be absent for up to 2 hours in any 24-hour period, providing that they remain contactable and are able to return quickly if required.

When the Responsible Pharmacist is **absent**, if there is no other pharmacist on the premises:

YOU CAN:
Take in prescriptions

YOU CANNOT:
Hand out prescriptions, even if they have been dispensed and checked
Supply GSL or P medicines

During this pandemic there may be occasions when these regulations are not followed for short periods, your organisation will have guidance on what to do in these circumstances.

Taking in prescriptions

All information on a prescription is confidential. You have a legal duty to protect patient confidentiality.

The pharmacy may receive prescriptions on paper or electronically (where the prescription is sent electronically from the prescriber to the pharmacy).

Before you take in a paper prescription, it is a good idea to check with the dispensary team:

- **waiting time: this will help patients to decide whether to wait for the prescription to be dispensed**
- **stock issues: the patient may decide to come back at a later time if stock needs to be ordered to fulfil their prescription**
- **delivery options: is this something you are able to offer from the pharmacy?**

In England, you should be aware of the current NHS prescription charge. Patients who need to pay for their prescriptions may pay the charges when they hand in a prescription, some may prefer to pay when they collect their medicines. The dispensary team can advise you on the charges payable.

Patients who are entitled to free NHS prescriptions should complete the declaration on the back of the prescription.

Private prescriptions are charged in a different way to NHS prescriptions. You should refer to dispensary team if you receive one.

Handling pharmacy stock

You may be asked to help with handling pharmacy stock, such as receiving deliveries and putting pharmacy stock onto shelves. Some stock has special storage conditions, such as fridge items that need to be refrigerated on receipt and controlled drugs which legally need to be kept under lock and key.

Make sure you read the relevant SOPs before handling pharmacy stock. Inappropriate storage of stock may affect the quality of products and lead to stock being written off. Items stored in the wrong place may increase the risk of errors being made.

Handing out prescriptions

When handing out a prescription, a patient may ask for their prescription or you can call out the patient's name if they are waiting. Ask them to state the patient's address or date of birth to confirm their identity. This will reduce the risk of handing medicines out to the wrong person, which is a breach of patient confidentiality. It also helps to protect patient safety by ensuring the right medicines reaches the right patient.

You should check:

- **if there are any additional items to collect from the fridge, which may be marked with a sticker on the bag**
- **prescription charges have been paid or the declaration on the back has been signed**
- **if the patient would like to discuss their medicines with the pharmacist**
- **for any notes from the dispensary team attached to the bag, as there may be an important message from the pharmacist to the patient or there could be items still owed**

The prescription should then be retained and filed in the appropriate place.