

New rules for electronic prescriptions to support virtual care in the community

31 March 2020

The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) have introduced new rules to make it easier for you to provide electronic prescriptions to support virtual care. This is especially important during this Covid-19 epidemic when exchanging paper prescriptions between prescriber, patient and pharmacy is burdensome, challenging and unsafe.

Some of the rules apply to systems that are integrated to the New Zealand Electronic Prescription Service (NZePS). Others are temporary and will expire when the Covid-19 alert levels are lowered.

Temporary exemption for signatures on prescriptions without NZePS

For community and hospital prescribers that do not use a system that can integrate with NZePS, the Director-General of Health approved a temporary waiver that authorises prescriptions that are not signed personally by a prescriber with their usual signature, to be recognised as legal prescriptions if they meet certain conditions, ensuring easy identification of the authorised prescriber and the healthcare facility.

This temporary waiver covers systems and settings where NZePS is not currently an option eg:

- hospital discharge and outpatient prescribing
- community prescribing from dentists, midwives, allied health clinicians, and GPs on Profile for Mac and Profile for Windows.

It acknowledges that the current Covid-19 pandemic has required new models for care including telehealth to enable care to be delivered in a manner that is safe for patients and clinicians. The requirement to print, sign and post a prescription to a pharmacy as required in the current regulations presents a number of issues:

- postal services will be disrupted during the Alert Level 4 restrictions
- exchanging paper prescriptions is a safety risk for community pharmacy
- many clinicians will be working away from their normal places of work and lack the equipment needed to print and scan or fax a signed script to pharmacy.

This temporary waiver recognises prescriptions not signed personally by a prescriber with their usual signature as legal when **all** of the following conditions are met:

- The prescription is generated by an electronic system which requires the prescriber to log on with a unique ID and password
- The prescription does not include Controlled Drugs (Class A, B or C) but can include an exempted drug or partially exempted drug as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975
- The prescription or the electronic communication that sends the prescription includes all of the following:
 1. the prescriber's registration authority number (DCNZ) that uniquely identifies the prescriber, or if they do not have a DCNZ registration number, their PersonID number (this is printed on your annual practising certificate)
 2. the contact details of the prescriber to enable the pharmacy to contact the prescriber to verify identity or request amendments to the prescription, and
 3. the following statement **"This Prescription meets the requirement of the Director-General of Health's waiver of March 2020 for prescriptions not signed personally by a prescriber with their usual signature"**.
- the prescription must be in a format that cannot be easily altered by anyone other than the prescriber (eg, PDF, photograph)
- the prescription must be sent directly to the community pharmacy - using a secure, electronic system to send the prescription to the pharmacy that identifies the prescriber's name and facility.

The following would satisfy this requirement:

- a secure email system that identifies the prescriber and the healthcare facility through its email address. Secure email as defined in the [Secure Digital Communications within the NZ Health & Disability advisory from June 2019](#)
- a secure clinical communication system that links prescriber and pharmacies such as the Electronic Request Management System
- a fax from a number that is recognised by the pharmacy as a valid prescriber.
- the electronic prescription and the message is kept on and submitted as required by the Integrated Pharmacist Services in the Community Agreement (IPSCA) as a criteria for payment.

Appendix 1 contains an example of a valid NZePS Signature Exempt Prescription.

If amendments are required to the prescription it is the prescriber's responsibility to contact the pharmacy to check if the prescription has been dispensed, instruct the pharmacy to cancel the prescription and to send through an amended prescription. The pharmacy should maintain a copy of the cancelled script and the amended script.

This waiver will expire when the Epidemic Preparedness (Covid-19) Notice 2020 expires or is revoked.

If you have any questions about electronic prescribing, please visit the [Ministry's website](#).

Amoxicillin 250mg Tab

Sig: Take 1 three times a day
Mitte: 15 tabs

This prescription meets the requirement of the Director-General of Health's waiver of March 2020 for prescriptions not signed personally by a prescriber with their usual signature

Dr. Sam Entwistle _____

DCNZ reg number*: DD1234

Phone: 021-1234567

*Or PersonID number as printed on your APC