

Medicine supply management

7.4.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

An overview of the systems and processes DHSC and NHS England use for responding to medicine shortages.

Introduction

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), in collaboration with NHS England and supply chain partners, is committed to managing and mitigating medicine supply issues across the UK.

Medicines licensed for use in the UK are sourced from a complex, highly regulated and global supply chain. Disruption can occur at any point in that end-to-end supply chain, from problems with raw materials and packaging production, to regulatory compliance testing, certification and 'last mile' delivery to patients.

For more detailed information on the causes of medicine supply disruption and how resilience is being strengthened, please see the joint DHSC and NHS England 2025 policy paper *Managing a robust and resilient supply of medicines*.

National management of medicines supply

DHSC has overall policy, strategic and operational responsibility for helping to ensure the continuity of the supply of medicines for all NHS services in England. NHS England's Medicines Procurement and Supply Chain (MPSC) team has specific responsibilities for:

- managing the continuity of supply for secondary care medicines
- some homecare services procured through MPSC frameworks

The role of DHSC and NHS England is to work closely with regulatory, pharmaceutical industry and clinical partners across the medicines supply chain, to help reduce the frequency of shortages and minimise patient impact when they occur.

While the rest of the UK has devolved powers to control the supply of medicines (including procurement, storage, allocation and distribution), DHSC regularly engages with the devolved governments to discuss potential supply issues. Where agreed, we take the necessary actions to mitigate supply disruptions for the whole UK in collaboration with all UK countries to help ensure all patients have equitable access to medicines.

Notification of shortages

Manufacturers have a legal obligation to notify DHSC of any medicine shortages and discontinuations that meet the reporting criteria - see guidance on *Reporting requirements for medicine shortages and discontinuations*, which includes information for manufacturers ahead of reporting an issue.

Suppliers need to submit notifications about potential supply issues on the discontinuations and shortages (DaSH) portal (sign in required).

Assessment of shortage notification

Upon receiving notification of a medicine shortage, DHSC and NHS England work closely with manufacturers, wholesalers and other partners to assess the impact and decide on an appropriate course of action to manage a supply issue.

DHSC and NHS England have published a comprehensive guide to the systems in place nationally for responding to a medicine shortage - see the guide to the systems and processes for managing medicines supply issues in England.

Communications in response to shortages

In the first instance, guidance for the management of medicines shortages is issued only to healthcare professionals through:

- medicine supply notifications (MSNs)
- the NHS medicines supply tool, a searchable, web-based tool hosted by the NHS Specialist Pharmacy Service (SPS)

Where appropriate, serious shortage protocols (SSPs) are published by NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA). SSPs support the management of shortages where an alternative medicine or quantity may be dispensed by pharmacies.

In more complex shortages, where relevant criteria are met, accredited organisations can issue a national patient safety alert (NatPSA) on the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) central alerting system.

Further information and guidance

See MHRA guidance on the steps manufacturers and suppliers can take to ease supply shortages: Medicines shortages: regulatory processes to manage supply disruptions.

NHS SPS offers guidance, resources and professional medicines advice including:

- understanding unlicensed medicines
- leaflets and posters for patients and healthcare professionals on the impact and management of medicines supply issues

See also DHSC's export and hoarding restriction list which outlines the medicines that you cannot export from the UK or hoard.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/medicine-supply-management>