

COVID-19 Quick Guide

Exemption – Electronic Transmission of Digital Image of Prescription (SA)

1. Eligible medicines

Schedule 4 medicines (excluding drugs of in Appendix D of the National Poisons Standard)

2. Duration of revised regulation

8 April 2020 – 30 September 2020 (unless earlier revoked)

3. Implications for outpatient supply of medicines

Patients who obtain medicines from hospital outpatient pharmacies may not have an original paper prescription during the COVID-19 pandemic as it may be inappropriate for them to attend a hospital outpatient clinic, or the outpatient clinic appointment has been conducted via telehealth, or that their outpatient appointment has been cancelled.

However, patients must be able to continue to access their medicines in order to ensure continuity and adherence and avoid acute health issues that require care in a hospital.

To minimise risk of transmission to patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, under the Exemption, South Australian hospitals are now able to supply medicines to patients based on an electronically transmitted digital image of an original prescription sent directly to the pharmacist from the prescriber.

This enables proposed hospital practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, where to minimise patient's need to visit a hospital and reduce their risk, hospital prescribers can prescribe medicines for outpatients remotely, and send a digital image of that prescription to the hospital pharmacy for dispensing and supply to the patient via mail.

A digital image of a prescription is an unaltered photo image and includes an unaltered facsimile image of an original prescription. Pharmacists must print out the hardcopy of digital image prescription and retain the hardcopy for 2 years from date of supply. Any repeat prescriptions should be held by the pharmacy.

4. Practice considerations

- Determine the workflows within your health service for supplying medicines off a digital image of an original prescription
- Determine which patient groups are in the highest risk patient categories that would benefit from these arrangements. i.e. chemotherapy patients, immunosuppressed patients
- Determine which outpatient clinics would benefit most from these arrangements, particularly if your department, or certain outpatient clinics are operating with reduced capacity
- Consider how printouts of the digital image of the prescription will be retained for two years
- Read the Department of Health and Wellbeing (SA) factsheet for health professionals: [PBS Special Arrangement and SA Exemption for supply of medicines using an image-based prescription](#)
- Read the Department of Health's (Fed) factsheet for pharmacists: [Interim arrangements for prescriptions for supply of medicines: Supporting telehealth patients and healthcare professionals](#)

5. Regulatory change details

On 8 April 2020, the Department of Health and Wellbeing (SA) announced an [Exemption – Electronic Transmission of Digital Image of Prescription; Regulation 33\(5\) Controlled Substances \(Poisons\) Regulations 2011](#) that until midnight 30 September 2020:

prescribers are exempt “from the requirement in Regulation 33(3)(c)(ii) to forward the written prescription to the pharmacist as soon as practicable after giving a prescription by electronic transmission.

This exemption is subject to the following conditions:

- 1. The prescription is for a patient prescribed a Schedule 4 medicine as the result of a telehealth attendance or phone attendance provided on or after 20 March 2020.*
- 2. The prescription given to the pharmacist by electronic transmission is a digital image of the prescription or a copy of the prescription.*
- 3. The prescription is given directly to the pharmacist by the prescriber (or an employee acting in accordance with the instruction of the prescriber) and is not given via the patient or any other intermediary.*
- 4. The provisions of the National Health (COVID-19 Supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits) Special Arrangement 2020 made under section 100 of the National Health Act 1953 (Cth) are complied with by the prescriber (whether or not the drug is a pharmaceutical benefit).*
- 5. The original prescription must be retained by the prescriber for two years.*
- 6. The original prescription is produced by the prescriber at the request of an authorised officer under the Controlled Substances Act 1984.*

This exemption comes into effect on 8 April 2020 and continues in force until midnight 30 September 2020 unless earlier revoked.”

These changes have also been enabled by amendments to the [National Health \(COVID-19 Supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits\) Amendment \(Expansion of Telehealth and Telephone Attendances\) Special Arrangement 2020](#) made on the 7 April 2020 that state:

“An approved hospital authority may supply a pharmaceutical benefit to a person on the first presentation of a prescription if a PBS prescriber has given the approved hospital authority dispenser a digital image of the prescription or a copy of the prescription.”