

Extension of temporary prescription waivers during Covid-19

16 March 2022

In March 2020, the Director General of Health issued a temporary waiver for systems and settings which are not yet integrated to the NZePS, e.g. hospital discharge and outpatient prescribing, community prescribing from dentists, midwives, allied health clinicians and GPs on Profile for Mac and Best Practice (NOTE: Profile for Windows is integrated with the NZePS and is no longer covered by this waiver). This waiver was set to expire on the 18th March 2022, in line with the expiry of the Epidemic Preparedness. (Covid-19) Notice 2020.

Cabinet has extended the Covid-19 Notice until the **17th June 2022**. This extends the Director General of Health's temporary waiver which for systems and settings that are not integrated with the NZePS to continue to issue signature exempt prescriptions if the requirements under that waiver are met. This extension also enables systems and settings that are working towards NZePS integration to complete this work.

Appendix 1 has additional detail on the requirements that must be met for non-NZePS signature exempt prescriptions. Further guidance can also be found on the Ministry of Health's website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/digital-health/other-digital-health-initiatives/emedicines/new-zealand-eprescription-service/signature-exempt-prescriptions-and-remote-prescribing>

This temporary waiver does not affect NZePS Prescriptions (with barcode). The ability to generate signature exempt prescriptions when NZePS is used is an enduring capability subject to requirements detailed in Appendix 2 being met.

This temporary waiver does not apply to a prescription that contains one or more Class A, B or C controlled drugs (except Class C exempt or partially exempt controlled drugs) which will continue to require an original wet ink prescriber signature. See Appendix 3 for the list of Class C Controlled Drugs. The classification for these Class C controlled drugs are also available on the NZ Formulary.

Except where a prescription contains one or more Class A, B or C controlled drugs (except Class C exempt or partially exempt controlled drugs), the extension of the Covid-19 notice also means that the following arrangements continue until the **17th June 2022** or earlier if notified:

- Pharmacies do not need to obtain original copies of non-NZePS faxed/emailed prescriptions if the following conditions are met:
 - each faxed prescription must otherwise be fully compliant with regulation 41 of the Medicines Regulations 1984; and
 - the prescription must meet the requirements of Temporary Exemption for Signatures on Prescriptions without NZePS (without an NZePS barcode) (see Appendix 1)
- Pharmacies do not need to match telephone or pharmacy generated prescriptions with a prescription signed by a general practitioner to claim for the dispensing if the following conditions are met:
 - an electronic medication chart is used by the ARC facility, GP and pharmacy for prescribing, dispensing and administration;
 - a telephone or pharmacy generated prescription is generated that matches the medication chart; and
 - the telephone or pharmacy generated prescription is attached to the medication chart and is kept and submitted as required by the Integrated Community Pharmacy Services Agreement (ICPSA).

Vendors and organisations that wish to integrate with the NZePS can contact onlinehelpdesk@health.govt.nz with "NZePS Integration" in the subject line.

Appendix 1

Temporary Exemption for Signatures on Prescriptions without NZePS (without an NZePS barcode)

For other 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. Many clinicians may be working away from their normal places of work and lack the equipment needed to print and scan or fax a signed prescription to a 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 and 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 a Class C exempted or partially exempted controlled drugs as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975
- the prescription includes all of the following:
 - the prescriber's registration authority number (e.g. MCNZ) that uniquely identifies the prescriber;
 - the contact details of the prescriber to enable the pharmacy to contact the prescriber to verify identify or request amendments to the prescription; and
 - 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 (e.g. PDF);
- the prescription must be sent directly to the community pharmacy using a secure, electronic system to send that identifies the prescriber 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. A secure email is defined in the Secure Digital Communications within the NZ Health & Disability advisory from June 2019:
<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/joint-acc-moh-advice-on-securing-email-and-fax-jun2019.pdf>
 - 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 is kept on and submitted as required by the Integrated Community Pharmacy Services Agreement (ICPSA) as a criterion for payment.

If amendments are required to the prescription it is the prescribers' 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. Pharmacy should maintain a copy of the cancelled prescription and the amended prescription.

It is also a prescriber's (not a pharmacy's) responsibility to ensure that they only use this waiver for signature exempt prescriptions if their system is not technically capable of integrating with the NZePS.

Example of a correctly written non-NZePS prescription:

NZMC Reg No. A88984-3 HPI Facility F1V076-
Mr Joe Blogs
33A Westy Lane, TeAtatu South, Auckland 0610
GMS:A4 DOB 10 Oct 1957 NHI: LLX0159 

Item Count
Subsidy Card

Rx

10 OCT 2019

Dispense stat list medicines once only unless Frequent Dispense specified

Prokinex 10mg Tab
Sig: Take one three times a day
Mitte: 270 tabs
(No Brand Substitution)

Propranolol Hydrochloride 40mg Tab (section 29) Frequent Dispense.
Sig: Take one three times a day
Mitte: 270 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.

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NZMC Reg No. A12345-3
Contact: sam.entwistle@cdhb.org.nz or call 027123456

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1	On electronic prescriptions without a barcode there must be a statement that reads "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"
2	The prescription must also have: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The registration authority number of the Prescriber (e.g. NZMC)• The contact details of the prescriber.

If you have any questions about electronic prescribing, please visit the Ministry's website:
<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/digital-health/other-digital-health-initiatives/emedicines/new-zealand-eprescription-service/signature-exempt-prescriptions-and-remote-prescribing>

Appendix 2

Signature Exempt Prescriptions using NZePS (with barcode)

A current Director-General of Health waiver under the Medicines Regulations 1984 allows unsigned prescriptions if all of the following conditions are met:

- the prescription does not include Controlled Drugs (Class A, B or C) but can include Class C exempted or partially exempted controlled drugs as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975.
- the prescription is a NZePS barcoded prescription.
- the system that generates the prescription has been authorised by the Ministry of Health for electronic prescribing.
- At the community pharmacy the barcode is used (e.g. scanned or manually entered) at the point of dispensing.

Being able to prescribe using NZePS is a requirement for this exemption to apply. This ensures:

- prescriptions can only be dispensed once and the electronic prescription when downloaded aligns with the medication details on the paper prescription.
- prescribers can be notified when medicines are not dispensed in a set number of days to monitor adherence.
- data quality of the community dispensed medication list, which is used by several hospitals for medicines reconciliation, is improved as prescriptions can be matched with the dispensing records.
- The ability to electronically prescribe medications without the need for signatures supports innovative care approaches, such as virtual consultations.

The Ministry has worked with the prescribing system vendors to develop a way for prescribers to generate electronic scripts that can be sent directly from the GP to a pharmacy. The following systems have now been approved to use this approach:

- Medtech 32 and Medtech Evolution
- MyPractice
- Indici
- Medimap
- Profile for Windows
- Pulse (MedOnline)
- Elixir Medical Software
- Waikato DHB Clinical Workstation

Signature Exempt Prescriptions will have an NZePs barcode. Some may have the text "Signature Exempt" on the signature line, and others may not. But the presence of the NZePS barcode that can be used at the point of dispensing is the definitive sign that a prescription is now legal, even if it doesn't have a signature.

Examples of correctly written NZePS prescriptions:

Example 1 (Left):

NZIC Reg No. A6594-3 HRI Facility F1V076
Mr Joe Bloggs
 33A Westy Lane, Te Atatu South, Auckland 0610
 GMSA4 DOB 10 Oct 1957 NHI: LLD159

Item Count:
 Subsidy Card:

Rx 10 OCT 2019
 Dispense stat list medicines once only unless Frequent Dispense specified
Prokinex 10mg Tab
 Sig: Take one three times a day
 Mite: 270 tabs
 (No Brand Substitution)
Propranolol Hydrochloride 40mg Tab (section 29) Frequent Dispense.
 Sig: Take one three times a day
 Mite: 270 tabs

Signature Exempt

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Example 2 (Right):

NZIC Reg No. A6594-3 HRI Facility F1V076
Mr Joe Bloggs
 33A Westy Lane, Te Atatu South, Auckland 0610
 GMSA4 DOB 10 Oct 1957 NHI: LLD159

Item Count:
 Subsidy Card:

Rx 10 OCT 2019
 Dispense stat list medicines once only unless Frequent Dispense specified
Prokinex 10mg Tab
 Sig: Take one three times a day
 Mite: 270 tabs
 (No Brand Substitution)
Propranolol Hydrochloride 40mg Tab (section 29) Frequent Dispense.
 Sig: Take one three times a day
 Mite: 270 tabs

Signature Exempt

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1	The electronic prescription has an NZePS barcode which is scanned or manually entered at the pharmacy. This barcode may be either on the top of the prescription or the bottom.
2	On some electronic prescriptions, a label for "Signature Exempt" may appear on the signature line. Even if this label is not present, this prescription will still be legal.

If you are not already on NZePS or have any questions about joining, please contact the Ministry's Online Helpdesk (onlinehelpdesk@health.govt.nz) including NZePS in the subject line to ensure a timely response.

Appendix 3 Class C Controlled Drugs

Class C controlled drugs (NOT exempt or partially exempt)

Prescriptions for the following list of medicines **require** the prescriber wet ink signature and the original prescription sent to the pharmacy (Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1977).

Class C Controlled Drugs (except Class C5)		
Generic name	Brand and form	Strength available
Buprenorphine	Buprenorphine Naloxone BNM sublingual tablet	2 mg with naloxone 0.5 mg 8 mg with naloxone 2 mg
Codeine	Tablet	15 mg, 30 mg, 60 mg
Dihydrocodeine	DHC Continus long-acting tablet	60 mg
Phenobarbitone	Tablet Max Health injection Aspen injection	15 mg, 30mg 200 mg/mL 200 mg/mL
Benzodiazepines (Class C5 Controlled Drug)		
Generic name	Brand and form	Strength available
Alprazolam	Xanax tablet Arrow-Alprazolam tablet	250 microgram, 500 microgram, 1 mg 250 microgram, 500 microgram, 1 mg, 2 mg
Clobazam	Frisium tablet	10 mg
Clonazepam	Paxam tablet Rivotril oral drops Rivotril injection	500 microgram, 2 mg 2.5 mg/mL 1 mg/mL
Diazepam	Arrow-Diazepam tablet Stesolid rectal tube Hospira injection	2 mg, 5 mg 5 mg, 10 mg 5 mg/mL
Lorazepam	Ativan tablet	1 mg, 2.5 mg
Midazolam	Midazolam-Clarix injection Pfizer injection	1 mg/mL, 5 mg/mL 1 mg/mL, 5 mg/mL
Nitrazepam	Nitrados tablet	5 mg
Oxazepam	Ox-Pam tablet	10 mg, 15 mg
Phentermine	Duromine capsule Metermine capsule	15 mg, 30 mg 15 mg, 30 mg
Temazepam	Normison tablet	10 mg
Triazolam	Hypam tablet	125 microgram, 250 microgram

Class C controlled drugs (that ARE exempt or partially exempt)

Prescriptions for the following list of medicines **DO NOT** require the prescriber wet ink signature and original prescription sent to the pharmacy (Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1977).

Class C (exempt and partially exempt) C controlled drugs
Gee's Linctus
Paracetamol and codeine combination preparations
Pholcodine