

April 2022

PSNC Briefing 014/22: HRT Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) FAQs

Background

This briefing provides answers to commonly asked FAQs around the new SSPs issued on 29 April 2022 for three HRT medicines:

HRT medicine	SSP number	Expiry date*
Oestrogel® Pump-Pack 0.06% gel	SSP019	29 July 2022
Ovestin® 1mg cream	SSP020	29 July 2022
Premique® Low Dose 0.3mg/1.5mg modified-release tablets	SSP021	29 July 2022

* Please note, these SSPs may be amended or revoked at any time but are currently due to expire on 29 July 2022 – PSNC will update contractors on any changes.

FAQs

SSP legal requirements

Q. Can pharmacists use their professional judgement to supply an alternative product to patients?

A. No. Supply in accordance with these SSPs only allows supply of a three-month quantity when the prescription is for a longer duration. It does not allow the supply of a different product. However, if pharmacists think that an alternative product would be suitable for the patient, they should either contact the prescriber to discuss this (with the patient's consent) or direct the patient back to the prescriber.

Q. Why are SSPs not issued for other HRT medicines reported to be affected by ongoing supply disruptions?

A. The medicines covered by the SSP019, SSP020 and SSP021 are those considered by the Ministers to be short supply and where an SSP would help manage the supply situation if clinicians advising Ministers think it is appropriate. The DHSC Supply team are constantly monitoring the supply situation affecting HRT medicines and SSPs for other HRT medicines may be issued if considered appropriate by Ministers.

Q. Do these SSPs apply to prescriptions with less than three months' worth of HRT?

A. No, the SSPs cannot be used if a patient presents a prescription for an amount less than or equivalent to three months' supply. Any prescription requesting three months or less of the affected HRT medicine should be dispensed as usual. For patients who pay for their prescriptions, prescription charges continue to apply for any HRT medicine and other chargeable items dispensed by the pharmacy.

Q. For prescriptions ordering greater than three months' supply of the affected HRT medicine, can three months' supply be given using the applicable SSP and the remainder dispensed later?

A. No, in accordance with these HRT SSPs pharmacists will only be able to provide a three months' supply of the affected product. Patients should be made aware that under the terms of these SSPs, the prescription will be deemed complete, and no further supply can be made from the same prescription above the three-month quantity. The outstanding balance cannot be dispensed later and patient will need to arrange for a new prescription to be issued by their GP before their treatment is due to run out.

Q. What can a pharmacist do if the patient does not consent to receiving the medicine supplied in accordance with this SSP?

A. Where a patient does not consent to receive a lower quantity in accordance with the SSP, the pharmacists should use their professional judgement to determine if other courses of action are appropriate whilst taking into consideration wider supply issues. For example, pharmacists in England must consider under their NHS terms of service if it is “reasonable and appropriate” to supply in accordance with the SSP. If the pharmacist concludes that it is not reasonable or appropriate to supply the medication in accordance with the SSP, the pharmacist must consider if they can dispense the prescription in the usual way ‘in a reasonable timescale’. If they can, the ordinary obligation to dispense in accordance with the prescription applies. If they cannot, because the pharmacist has insufficient supply to fulfil the prescribed quantity within a reasonable timescale, the pharmacist may return the prescription, but if they do so, the pharmacist must provide the patient with appropriate advice about going back to the prescriber.

If the pharmacist concludes that it is reasonable and appropriate to dispense in accordance with the SSP, but the patient persists in refusing to accept the option of the lesser quantity, the pharmacist may advise the patient that they will dispense in accordance with the SSP or not at all, if that is in accordance with their professional judgement.

The patient retains the right to either accept the professional decision of the pharmacist or to ask for their prescription to be returned to them

Q. Will the SSPs apply to cross-border prescriptions?

A. Yes. Patients from England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland who present their prescriptions for any of the affected HRT medicines above are eligible to receive a lower quantity under the terms of the applicable SSP.

Q. Does the SSP apply to private prescriptions?

A. Yes. The scope of an SSP applies to valid prescriptions that meets the requirements of the Human Medicine Regulations 2012, so it would cover both NHS and private prescriptions, unless where it is stated otherwise on the SSP itself.

Patient charges

Q. Do prescription charges apply for supplies made against the HRT SSPs for a reduced quantity?

A. No prescription charge is payable if a patient receives a smaller quantity of the medicine than the quantity originally ordered on the prescription if it was supplied in accordance with an SSP for reduced quantity.

Q. If a supply is made against an SSP for a reduced quantity, how will NHSBSA process the prescription as a no-charge item?

A. This depends on the patient charge/exemption status and whether the prescription is for one of the affected HRT medicines only or if it has mixed items (HRT item and other chargeable items).

For patients who normally pay for their prescriptions:

- a. **HRT-only prescription:** If a prescription is issued for the affected HRT medicine only, the pharmacist will need to endorse the prescription in accordance with the endorsement guidance for the applicable HRT SSP and mark the prescription as **charge paid** even though no charges will have been taken if the medicine was supplied against the SSP. Once submitted for payment, the NHSBSA will recognise the SSP endorsement and process the prescription as no-charge item i.e., no charges will be deducted by the NHSBSA.
- b. **Mixed prescription:** If a mixed prescription is issued (HRT medicine and other chargeable item), the pharmacist will need to endorse the prescription in accordance with the endorsement guidance for the applicable HRT SSP and mark the prescription as charge paid even though no charges will have

been taken if the product was supplied against the SSP. Once submitted for payment, the NHSBSA will recognise the SSP endorsement and process the HRT product as a no-charge item and the other item(s) will be chargeable i.e., NHSBSA will only deduct prescription charges for the other chargeable items.

For patients who are exempt from prescriptions charges:

- c. **HRT-only and mixed prescriptions:** If a prescription is issued for the affected HRT medicine with or without other chargeable items, the pharmacist will need to endorse the HRT medicine in accordance with the endorsement guidance for the applicable HRT SSP and mark the prescription with the correct exemption reason (for example, has a valid medical exemption certificate). This will ensure that the NHSBSA process all items on the form as exempt from prescription charges.

The table below shows how to process prescriptions ordering more or less than three months' worth of the affected HRT medicine.

Prescription received for affected HRT medicine	For prescription length greater than 3 months of HRT medicine (<i>for e.g., 12-month prescription for Oestrogel®</i>)	For prescription length less than or equal to 3 months of HRT medicine (<i>for e.g., 3-month prescription for Oestrogel®</i>)
Can the SSP be used	Yes	No – the SSP cannot be used, and the pharmacist should continue to dispense in accordance with the prescription.
Quantity to supply in accordance with the SSP	Equivalent to 3 months' supply of prescribed HRT medicine.	N/A
EPS endorsement requirements	Contractors must select SSP and input the three-digit reference number, leaving a space between SSP and the reference number for e.g., SSP 019	Normal prescription endorsing requirements apply
Paper prescription endorsement requirements	In addition to the medicine and quantity supplied, contractors must endorse SSP followed by the three-digit reference number.	Normal prescription endorsing requirements apply
Prescription charges for the HRT medicine	No prescription charges are payable if a quantity of three months' worth is supplied in accordance with the SSP.	If a patient pays for their prescriptions, charges apply as usual for the HRT medicine dispensed against the prescription.
Charges to be taken for any other items prescribed on the same prescription form	Where applicable, charges are payable for any other item dispensed on the same prescription form.	Where applicable, charges are payable for any other item dispensed on the same prescription form.
Paid or exempt status	If a patient normally pays for their prescriptions, the paid status should be selected even though no charge is taken for the three months' worth of HRT medicine supplied in accordance with the SSP. Once submitted for payment, the NHSBSA will recognise the SSP endorsement and process the prescription as a no-charge item i.e., no charges will be deducted by the NHSBSA. If patient is exempt from prescription charges, the	The applicable patient charge or exempt status should be selected before the prescription is submitted for payment.

	correct exemption reason should be selected.	
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If you have any queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information, please contact PSNC's Dispensing and Supply Team (info@psnc.org.uk) or call 0203 1220 810