

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

3 APRIL 2020

The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) has 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.

Signature Exempt Prescriptions using NZePS

Below are details on what can be prescribed and what systems you need in place to generate electronic prescriptions without signatures via the New Zealand Electronic Prescription Service (NZePS). Please use electronic prescriptions as much as possible to support efforts to maintain social distancing.

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

- 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 is a NZePS barcoded prescription
- the system that generates the prescription has been authorised by the Ministry of Health for electronic prescribing
- the prescription is scanned and downloaded at a community pharmacy.

Appendix 1 contains examples of valid NZePS Signature Exempt Prescriptions.

The ability to electronically prescribe medications without the need for signatures supports innovative care approaches, such as virtual consultations.

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

- Medtech 32 and Medtech Evolution
- MyPractice
- Indici
- Medimap and
- Group Healthcare's reScript.

Intrahealth's Profile for Windows and Profile for Mac cannot offer Signature Exempt prescribing at this stage.

All PMS vendors have been contacting their users to provide them with training material on how to work remotely including:

- how to access your PMS from home or other locations
- how to generate a PDF of a prescription that can be attached to your practice email address and sent to a pharmacy
- how to print from home or any location should you need to physically sign a prescription (eg, scripts for Controlled Drugs).

The vendors and the Ministry are also putting more resources into supporting GPs to onboard onto the NZePS. If you have issues with your system not generating or transmitting prescriptions, please talk to your vendor.

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.

Temporary Exemption for Signatures on Prescriptions without NZePS

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.

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 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:
 - the prescriber's registration authority number (eg, 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 (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 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
<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 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 examples of valid Signature Exempt Prescriptions.

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 script and the amended script.

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

Vendors that are not integrated with the NZePS are encouraged to contact onlinehelpdesk@health.govt.nz (with NZePS) in the subject line to begin the process of NZePS integration to ensure your clients can continue to generate and send unsigned, valid prescriptions directly to pharmacy.

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 1

Prescribing without a signature

Prescription Using NZePS

Key Requirements

- prescription must not be for Controlled Drugs (Class A, B or C)
- prescription is a NZePS barcoded prescription
- issued from system authorised by the Ministry of Health for electronic prescribing
- prescription scanned and downloaded at a community pharmacy.

How can I spot a legal Signature Exempt Script

Signature Exempt Scripts will have an NZePs barcode. Some may have the test “Signature Exempt” on the signature line, and others may not. But the presence of the NZePS barcode that can be scanned at the pharmacy is the definitive sign that a prescription is now legal even if it doesn't have a signature.

The image shows two examples of NZePS barcoded prescriptions. Both are for Mr Joe Bloggs, dated 10 OCT 2019, and issued by Dr Sam Entwistle. The left prescription includes the text "Signature Exempt" on the signature line. Both prescriptions list Prokinex 10mg Tab and Propranolol Hydrochloride 40mg Tab. Red boxes and numbers 1 and 2 highlight the NZePS barcode and the "Signature Exempt" label, respectively.

1	The electronic prescription has an NZePS barcode which is scanned 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.

Electronic Prescription Direct to Pharmacist for Non-NZePS systems (during Covid-19 pandemic)

Key Requirements

Details of prescription:

- prescription must not include Controlled Drugs (Class A, B or C)
- prescription contains the prescribers registration authority number
- prescription contains contact details of the prescriber
- must contain 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”.

How to issue?

- the prescription must be generated by an electronic system that requires the prescriber to log on with a unique ID and password
- prescription must be in a format that cannot be easily altered e.g. PDF.
- prescription must be sent directly to the community pharmacy using a secure, electronic system that identifies the prescriber name and facility e.g. secure email or prescription must be faxed from a number that is recognised by the pharmacy as a valid prescriber.

NZMC Reg No. A88984-3 HPI Facility F1V076-
Mr Joe Bloggs
 33A Westly Lane, Te Atatu 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.

1

Dr Sam Entwistle _____ Page 1 of 1
 NZMC Reg No. A12345-3
 Contact: sam.entwistle@cdhb.org.nz or call 027123456

2

1	On electronic scripts without a barcode, there must be a statement that “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 or the electronic communication (fax, email, electronic request management system message) that contains the prescription must also have : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The registration authority number of the Prescriber (eg NZMC) • The contact details of the prescriber.

COVID-19