Signature Exempt Prescriptions – Frequently Asked Questions

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What are Signature Exempt Prescriptions?

Signature Exempt Prescriptions are electronic prescriptions that do not require a physical wet ink signature from an authorised prescriber.

For general practices and others that have access to a prescribing system that is integrated to the New Zealand Electronic Prescription Service, there is an enduring Director-General of Health waiver that permits Signature Exempt Prescriptions certain conditions are met. The section below, NZePS Signature Exempt Prescriptions (with Barcode) provides guidance for prescribers, community pharmacies and vendors on how to generate, send and manage prescriptions without a signature that have been made valid under this waiver.

For systems and settings where NZePS is not currently an option e.g. hospital discharge and outpatient prescribing, community prescribing from dentist, midwives and allied health clinicians, there is a temporary waiver which recognises prescriptions not signed personally by a prescriber with their usual signature, as legal when the certain conditions are met. These conditions and guidance on how to manage these prescriptions can be found in the section Temporary Exemption from Signatures on Prescriptions without NZePS (no barcode). This permission and ability will expire when the Epidemic Preparedness (Covid-19) Notice 2020 expires or is revoked.

For questions about the content below please email onlinehelpdesk@health.govt.nz

NZePS Signature Exempt Prescriptions (with barcode)

How can I generate a Signature Exempt Prescription?

The following conditions must be met for a signatureless prescription with an NZePS barcode to be valid:

- 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 system that generates the prescription has been authorised by the Ministry of Health for Signature Exempt Prescriptions. The following systems have currently been certified to pilot this capability:
  - MedTech32, MedTech Evolution
  - MyPractice
  - Indici
  - Medimap.
For these prescriptions to be valid, the pharmacy must also be able to scan and download these prescriptions from NZePS.

If you currently use Medtech 32 or Medtech Evolution, MyPractice, Indici or Medimap and you’re not already on NZePS (i.e. generating prescriptions with an NZePS barcode), please contact onlinehelpdesk@health.govt.nz with NZePS in the subject line to begin the process of prescribing with NZePS.

This waiver is enduring, unlike the temporary waiver for non NZePS systems, and will not be revoked when the Epidemic Preparedness (Covid-19) Notice 2020 expires or is revoked.

**Why can’t I generate a Signature Exempt Prescription for a Controlled Drug?**

Regulations relating to the prescribing and dispensing of Controlled Drugs are covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act which the Director-General does not have the authority to waive.

Controlled Drugs (Class A, B and C) as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act are not covered and must still meet the current regulations:

- NZePS Class B and Class C prescriptions require a physically signed prescription to be sent to pharmacy within 2 working days of the prescription date, unless it is an exempted drug or partially exempted drug as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975.
- Non-NZePS Class B drugs require the Controlled Drug triplicate forms to be completed and sent to pharmacy.

Exempted drug, or partially exempted drug, as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 are covered by these Signature Exempt waivers.

**Which general practice management systems (GP PMS) have been approved for Signature Exempt Prescriptions?**

The following primacy care systems have been approved to pilot Signature Exempt Prescriptions:

- MedTech32, MedTech Evolution
- MyPractice
- Indici
- Medimap.

Intrahealth, with its Profile for Windows and Profile for Mac, are not integrated to the NZePS and cannot produce Signature Exempt Prescriptions under this waiver. Users of Profile will be able to generate signatureless prescriptions under the temporary waiver if the conditions set out in the section **Temporary Exemption from Signatures on Prescriptions without NZePS (no barcode)**.

**As a pharmacist, is it legal for us to receive a Signature Exempt Prescription?**

Under the current Director-General of Health waiver, a prescription without the physical, wet ink signature of an authorised prescriber is valid if the prescription:
• is for non-controlled drugs ONLY; and
• is a NZePS barcoded prescription; and
• is downloaded at the pharmacy from NZePS; and
• it is sent from a system authorised by the Ministry of Health.

If these conditions are **not** met, under current regulations, you will still need to receive the signed original prescription from the prescriber. Below are examples of valid, signature exempt NZePS prescriptions.

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**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.

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**How can I send a Signature Exempt Prescription to a pharmacy directly?**

There are a number of available secure channels to send a Signature Exempt Prescription directly to a pharmacy:

- The following systems allow you to attach the Signature Exempt Prescription to an email to send it to the community pharmacy on behalf of the patient:
  - MedTech32, MedTech Evolution
  - MyPractice
  - Indici and
  - Medimap.
- MyPractice prescribers can send an electronic prescription via HealthLink to any pharmacy that has a Healthlink EDI mailbox.
- Group Healthcare’s reScript product is also able to send a Signature Exempt Prescription to a community pharmacy that the patient chooses.

Prescribers can also fax the prescriptions to the pharmacy if the pharmacy still has a fax machine.
Why does my GP Practice Management System need to be integrated to NZePS for me to do Signature Exempt Prescriptions?

The electronic prescription is held in NZePS and available to download at the pharmacy, keeping an electronic record of the prescribing and dispensing data. The prescription can only be dispensed once, and it can also enable tracking back to the prescribing system and practice.

How can I electronically prescribe from home?

The PMS vendors have created training material on how to:

- access your PMS from home or other locations;
- generate a PDF of a prescription which can be attached to your practice email address and sent to a pharmacy;
- print from home, or any location, should you need to physically sign a prescription (e.g. prescriptions for all Controlled Drugs – Class B and Class C).

Please contact your PMS vendor to access this guidance.

Where can I find the email address of a community pharmacy?

The contact details of community pharmacies can be found on Healthpoint (www.healthpoint.co.nz)

Some PMS systems have updated their address books with the email addresses of community pharmacies.

As a pharmacist, should I use a different email address for prescriptions?

Separating the prescriptions emailed to your pharmacy helps you to:

- monitor one mailbox for incoming prescriptions
- manage emailed prescriptions that have already been printed and dispensed.

Healthpoint has now provided pharmacy a separate field for prescription email addresses.

You will need to turn on email security on this email account. Please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions on Secure Messaging for guidance on how to make your email secure, or check that it is: https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/secure-messaging-faq-2019-4-dec-2019.pdf

You may also wish to contact the general practices in your vicinity to ensure they have your up to date prescription email address so that they can update their practice address books.

How can I trust that an email address is secure?

It is important to be vigilant and ensure you are confident that you are sending or receiving prescriptions from a valid general practice or pharmacy email address. If you have any doubts you can:
• check Healthpoint for the email address. Healthpoint is currently contacting every pharmacy to update their prescription email addresses;

• if the email address is not on Healthpoint, then phone the practice or pharmacy to confirm.

Some PMS systems are working on updating their address books directly from Healthpoint.

**Temporary Exemption from Signatures on Prescriptions without NZePS (no barcode)**

**How can I generate a Signature Exempt Prescription?**

For systems and settings where NZePS is not currently an option e.g. hospital discharge and outpatient prescribing, community prescribing from dentist, midwives and allied health clinicians, there is a temporary waiver which recognises prescriptions not signed personally by a prescriber, with their usual signature, as legal when all the following conditions are met:

• The prescription is generated and/or sent by an electronic system that 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 includes the prescription includes all of the following:
  o The prescriber’s registration authority number (e.g. MCNZ) that uniquely identifies the prescriber
  o The contact details of the prescriber to enable the pharmacy to contact the prescriber to verify, identify or request amendments to the prescription and
  o 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, photograph)

• The prescription must be sent directly to the community pharmacy using a secure, electronic system that identifies the prescriber’s name and facility. The following would satisfy this requirement:
  o A secure email system that identifies the prescriber and the healthcare facility through its email address. Secure email is defined in the Secure Digital Communications within the NZ Health & Disability advisory that June 2019
  o A secure clinical communication system that links prescriber and pharmacies such as the Electronic Request Management System
  o A fax from a number that is recognised by the pharmacy as a valid prescriber.
The electronic prescription and the message are kept on file and submitted as required by the Integrated Pharmacist Services in the Community Agreement (IPSCA) as a criterion for payment. This waiver will expire when the Epidemic Preparedness (Covid-19) Notice 2020 expires or is revoked.

**Why can’t I generate a Signature Exempt Prescription for a Controlled Drug?**

Regulations relating to the prescribing and dispensing of Controlled Drugs are covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act which the Director-General does not have the authority to waive.

Controlled Drugs (Class A, B and C) as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act are not covered and must still meet the current regulations:

- NZePS Class B and Class C prescriptions require a physically signed prescription to be sent to pharmacy within 2 working days of the prescription date, unless it is an exempted drug or partially exempted drug as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975.
- Non-NZePS Class B prescriptions (no barcode) require the Controlled Drug triplicate forms to be completed and sent to pharmacy.

Exempted drug or partially exempted drug as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 are covered by these Signature Exempt waivers.

**Can I send handwritten scripts as Signature Exempt Scripts?**

For a handwritten prescription to be valid under the temporary waiver, the handwritten prescription that is photographed or scanned must:

- include all of the following information on the handwritten prescription or the email/message it is sent in:
  - 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” AND
- be in a format that cannot be easily altered by anyone other than the prescriber (e.g. PDF, photograph) AND
- be sent directly to the community pharmacy using a secure, electronic system 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 is defined in the Secure Digital Communications within the NZ Health & Disability advisory June 2019
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.

- not contain Controlled Drugs (Classes A, B & C). However, it can include an exempted or partially exempted drugs as defined by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1975.

**As a pharmacist, is it legal for us to receive a prescription without a signature?**

Under the temporary Director-General of Health waiver, a prescription without the physical, wet ink signature of an authorised prescriber is valid if it meets the conditions set out under the question above: *How can I generate a Signature Exempt Prescription?*

The example prescription below shows an example of a valid non-barcoded prescription (non-NZePS) without a signature, under this temporary waiver, if it is also sent in a format that cannot be easily altered by anyone other than the prescriber (e.g. PDF, photograph) AND sent directly to the community pharmacy using a secure, electronic system that identifies the prescriber name and facility.

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**Mr Joe Bloggs**

314A Gladstone Rd, Auckland 0601
DOB: 10/01/1957  MALE  PLLD1638  

Rx

10 OCT 2019

Dispense stat list medicines only unless Frequent Dispense specified

Propanolol 10mg Tab
Sig: Take one three times a day
UT: 50ml
(no brand substitution)

Propranolol Hydrochloride 40mg Tab (section 2D) Frequent Dispense
Sig: Take one three times a day
UT: 50ml

1 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 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”
What systems can I use to generate or send Signature Exempt Prescriptions to a pharmacy under this temporary waiver?

Any systems or processes (including manual/handwritten) that includes all of the required information under this waiver can be used to generate a prescription. This includes but is not limited to:

- paper prescriptions that are completed by hand
- prescriptions generated by hospital-based systems e.g. SMT (Orion’s Soprano Medical Templates)
- MS Word documents.

There are some key requirements that must be met in systems and processes that send the prescription including:

- be sent in a format that is difficult for anyone other than the prescriber to amend. This can include:
  - PDF
  - Fax
  - Photograph
- be sent through a secure electronic communication system e.g.
  - Fax
  - Secure email (Secure email is defined in the Secure Digital Communications within the NZ Health & Disability advisory June 2019
  - The South Island Electronic Request Management System (ERMS).
- ensures that only authorised prescribers are able to send and that clearly identifies the prescriber and their healthcare facility.

Where can I find the email address of a community pharmacy?

The contact details of community pharmacies can be found on Healthpoint (www.healthpoint.co.nz).

Some PMS systems have updated their address books with the email addresses of community pharmacies.

As a pharmacist, should I use a different email address for prescriptions?

Separating the prescriptions emailed to your pharmacy helps you:

- monitor one mailbox for incoming prescriptions
- manage emailed prescriptions that have already been printed and dispensed.

Healthpoint have now provided pharmacy a separate field for prescription email addresses.
You will need to turn on email security on this email account. Please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions on Secure Messaging for guidance how to make your email secure or check that it is: https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/secure-messaging-faq-2019-4-dec-2019.pdf

You may also wish to contact the general practices in your vicinity to ensure they have your up to date prescription email address so that they can update their practice address books.

**How can I trust that an electronic address I receive a prescription from is secure?**

It is important to be vigilant and ensure you are confident that you are sending or receiving prescriptions from a valid general practice or pharmacy email address. If you have any doubts check:

- Healthpoint for the email address. Healthpoint is currently contacting every pharmacy to update their prescription email addresses
- if the email address is not on Healthpoint, then phone the practice or pharmacy to confirm
- if an alternative system is used to send the prescription e.g. ERMS, Healthlink, then it should clearly identify the prescriber and the facility.

Some PMS systems are working on updating their address books directly from Healthpoint.

**How will I know if the temporary waiver is still in force?**

This waiver will expire when the Epidemic Preparedness (Covid-19) Notice 2020 expires or is revoked. The Ministry of Health will issue an advisory to all pharmacies and prescriber registration authorities as well as publish this on the Ministry’s website.

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