Frequently Asked Questions

Please note: This is a living FAQ document that we will add to and change over time so practices and pharmacies should check back for the latest updates on these Q&As. Any additions will be added, or changes made, at the beginning of each month.

If you need further information please email *onlinehelpdesk@health.govt.nz*

Electronic Transmission of Prescriptions

- **Can pharmacies now receive prescriptions by email (barcoded and not barcoded)?**
    A practice can scan and email a prescription (barcoded or not) to a pharmacy if:
    - *the prescription is physically signed by the authorised prescriber AND*
    - *all secure messaging criteria are met by the sender.*

    The same rules apply as they do now for requiring the original to be sent to pharmacy for faxed prescriptions.

    The original prescription is NOT REQUIRED by the pharmacy:
    - *If the emailed prescription is signed AND*
    - *has a barcode AND*
    - *is downloaded from NZePS at pharmacy AND*
    - *is for non-controlled drugs.*

    The original signed prescription IS REQUIRED by the pharmacy:
    - *If the emailed prescription is signed, has a barcode and is for controlled drugs OR*
    - *If the emailed prescription is signed, has a barcode, is for non-controlled drugs and is not downloaded from NZePS at pharmacy OR*
    - *If the emailed prescription is signed and does not have a barcode.*

- **Can a practice or pharmacy receive analogue faxes if they do not have a copper (analogue) line but have been set up to receive digital faxes?**
    Pharmacies who have the capability can receive analogue faxes as emails as long as their telecommunications provider has met the standard for email security set out by the Ministry (click here to access the guidance).

- **What is the difference between SSL and TLS? Is SSL adequate for the security requirements?**
    TLS (Transport Layer Security) and SSL (Secure Socket Layer) are both technology protocols that are used for encryption. TLS 1.2 or higher is the minimum-security standard requirement as SSL by itself is not adequate. You can find guidance on how to set up TLS online or through your IT service provider.

- **What email servers meet the security requirements? E.g. Gmail, G-suite, Hotmail, Yahoo, Outlook 365.**

  Gmail, Yahoo Mail, Hotmail, G Suite mail services and Microsoft 365 / Office 365 email services DO use the required email security standard (TLS) by default.
  If you use another email system e.g. Xtra, you will need to contact your provider, e.g. Spark, to confirm if your email system meets the requirements.

- **Is there a way for a practice or pharmacy to check if their email is secure?**

  There are several online tools that enable you to check if your email or that of the practice or pharmacy that you intend to communicate with is secure. One such tool is CheckTLS (www.checktls.com) which allows you to put in your email address or that of a practice or pharmacy to get an instant security assessment. A score of 90 or better on CheckTLS that shows "OK" under the TLS column is an indication that adequate security is in place to protect the Email during transmission to the destination.

If you find that the practice or pharmacy you'd like to send your patient's prescription or information to gets a score of less than 90, or if you have any doubts at all, you can still:

  - *Encrypt or password protect your scanned prescription before emailing it. Don't forget to share the password to the file with the receiving practice or pharmacy using another method, such as text message or phone call, OR*

- Post the prescription or give a copy of the prescription to the patient to take to the pharmacy.

There are several tools that allow you to encrypt your scanned files. Some versions of Acrobat provide you with the ability to set a password for your file. There is also a free tool called 7-zip that allows you to compress and password protect your file so that it can be sent securely, even if the practice or pharmacy you're communicating with has not turned on required security.

Instructions on how to use tools like 7-zip can be found online including https://answers.fredonia.edu/display/SC/How+to+Password+Protect+and+Encrypt+Files+using+7-Zip+for+Windows

- **What should I do with an email prescription after I've sent it or dispensed it?**

  *If you're a prescriber who has emailed a prescription to a pharmacy you should ensure that you have a record, or note of that prescription being sent, in your Practice Management System and then fully delete the email, including any locations such as **Sent items, Inbox, and permanently delete from Trash.***

  If you're a pharmacy that has received an emailed prescription you should delete the email as soon as you have printed the prescription and dispensed the medications.

  Email services should NOT be used to store prescription information.

  Here, email is just replacing fax. Where we currently fax prescriptions, we're allowing prescribers to securely email them. For NZePS barcoded prescriptions these can only be dispensed once. So, the risk of fraud/duplication is managed. For prescriptions that are not barcoded (non NZePS), the original signed prescription still needs to be sent to the pharmacy (just as it is today with faxed non-barcoded prescriptions). There is a slight risk of fraud/duplication here (as there is today) which is why we're keen to push the NZePS adoption to 100%.

- **Can a prescriber electronically send a 'signature exempt' prescription from their PMS directly to a pharmacy?**

  ***No. This is currently in limited trial only.** If you're not currently in the limited trial your practice and your PMS system will need to apply to the Ministry for approval. This process ensures that the required controls are in place to ensure only authorised prescribers can electronically send a valid prescription.*

  The sector will be advised when a physical signature is no longer required in particular cases.

  NOTE: The waiver to allow an authorised prescriber to electronically send a barcoded 'signature exempt' prescription directly to a pharmacy can only be issued under the Medicines Regulations 1984 and cannot override the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1977.

  Barcoded prescriptions for controlled drugs will still be required to be signed before emailing in PDF form.

- **Can a patient email their prescription (with or without a barcode) to the pharmacy of their choice?**

    There is nothing that physically stops a prescription from being scanned and emailed by a patient to a pharmacy. However, pharmacies are advised not to dispense medicines off prescriptions emailed to a pharmacy by anywhere other than the email address related to the authorised prescriber who has generated the prescription.

    *Whilst some assurance of the authenticity would be provided if the prescription was downloaded from NZePS **the original prescription would be required to be obtained in all cases.***

    Where the prescription is a non-NZePS prescription, and no download of the barcode is possible, then there is the potential for the prescription to be emailed to multiple pharmacies and dispensed more than once.

- **Should I tell my local pharmacy or practice that I am using secure email?**

    Yes. This will make it easier for your pharmacy or practice to trust prescriptions that have been received from you. In some regions, the DHBs would also like to be notified if or when you're using a secure email system. Your local DHB will be contacting you if this is a requirement in your district.

- **Can I use a digital or electronic signature for my prescriptions?**

    No. A physical (ink, wet) signature is still required.

    The Ministry of Health is undertaking a trial for "signature exempt' or paperless prescriptions. This will remove the need for prescribers to sign (physically or electronically) a copy of the prescription if that prescription is sent via NZePS and downloaded from NZePS at the pharmacy. This is currently in limited trial only. If you're not currently in the limited trial, your practice and your PMS system will need to apply to the Ministry for approval. This process ensures that the required controls are in place to ensure only authorised prescribers can electronically send a valid prescription.

    The sector will be advised when a physical signature is no longer required in particular cases.

    NOTE: The waiver to allow an authorised prescriber to electronically send a barcoded 'signature exempt' prescription directly to a pharmacy can only be issued under the Medicines Regulations 1984 and cannot override the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1977.

    Barcoded prescriptions for controlled drugs will still be required to be signed before emailing in PDF form.

- **When do I need to have moved to secure email and stop using faxes?**

You will need to ensure that your email has met the security requirements by January 2020.

You will need to stop using analogue faxes by December 2020 at the latest. You will also need to confirm that you're no longer using faxes by emailing the Ministry of Health (itsecurity@health.govt.nz)

- **Do we (pharmacy) still need to print the script after receiving by email and scanning the barcode?**

  *Yes, pharmacy do need to print the emailed prescription as they are still required to annotate on the paper prescription and file in the batch. **NOTE: The original prescription is required for ALL scripts (barcoded or not) that are emailed from a patient.***