



14 June 2024

Medicine Supply Alert Notice

Erythromycin 250mg gastro-resistant tablets

Priority: Level 2*

Valid until: w/c 24 June 2024

Issue

1. Erythromycin 250mg tablets are currently out of stock until week commencing 24 June 2024.
2. Erythromycin 500mg tablets remain available but are unable to support an increase in demand.
3. Erythromycin oral suspensions remain available but are unable to support an increase in demand.
4. Azithromycin 500mg tablets remain available and will be able to support increased demand.
5. Clarithromycin 250mg and 500mg tablets remain available and will be able to support increased demand.
6. The actions on the previously issued [MSAN\(2024\)28](#) for clarithromycin 125mg/5ml and 250mg/5ml oral suspension do not impact the actions specified here.

Advice and Actions

7. Where supplies of erythromycin 250mg tablets are not available, prescribers should:
 - review any impacted individual and consider prescribing azithromycin 500mg tablets or clarithromycin 250mg or 500mg tablets if clinically appropriate, ensuring the person is counselled on the appropriate dose and course length (see Additional information);
 - for pregnant women, consider prescribing azithromycin as the preferred alternative to erythromycin. Where azithromycin is not considered appropriate or unavailable, consider prescribing clarithromycin;
 - where azithromycin or clarithromycin tablets are not suitable, consider prescribing an alternative antimicrobial as appropriate, depending on the indication, pregnancy status of the person, and local prescribing guidelines;
 - consider prescribing unlicensed products only where licensed alternatives are not appropriate, lead times vary; and
 - if the above options are not considered appropriate, advice should be sought from specialists on alternative management options.

Additional Information

Clinical Information

*<https://www.nss.nhs.scot/media/1842/medicine-supply-alert-notices-definitions-of-classifications-21-october-2019.pdf>

8. Erythromycin is a macrolide antibiotic. Macrolides for some indications are considered an alternative to penicillin for penicillin-allergic patients.
9. Erythromycin, clarithromycin and azithromycin have a similar spectrum of antibiotic activity and similar side effect profile.

Macrolide use in pregnancy

10. Macrolide use in pregnancy should be reserved for indications where there are no suitable alternatives with adequate pregnancy safety data and should only be used if the benefit of treatment is expected to outweigh any small increased risks which may exist.
11. Erythromycin is the preferred choice, followed by azithromycin and clarithromycin. Order preference is due to experience with the drugs in pregnancy rather than any signal of additional harm (UKTIS: Macrolides in pregnancy).

Table 1. Equivalent dosing regimens of alternative macrolides for prescribed dosing regimens of erythromycin

Indication	Erythromycin	Clarithromycin	Azithromycin
Treatment doses	250mg 4 times a day	250mg twice daily	500mg once daily
	500mg twice daily	250mg twice daily	500mg once daily
	500mg 4 times a day	500mg twice daily	500mg once daily
	1,000mg twice daily	500mg twice daily	500mg once daily
	1,000mg 4 times a day	500mg twice daily (ceiling dose)	500mg once daily
Prophylaxis doses	250mg twice daily	125mg twice daily	Seek specialist advice
	500mg twice daily	250mg twice daily	Seek specialist advice
Duration		Use same duration as erythromycin.	If erythromycin treatment is for 5 days or 7 days, then the equivalent for azithromycin is 3 days

Note: The equivalent doses stated may not be appropriate for patients with gastro-intestinal stasis as an indication

12. Please refer to the links below for further information:

- [SmPC Erythromycin 250mg GR tablets](#)
- [SmPC Azithromycin \(emc\)](#)
- [SmPC Azithromycin \(MHRA\)](#)
- [SmPC Clarithromycin \(emc\)](#)
- [SmPC Clarithromycin \(MHRA\)](#)
- [BNF Erythromycin](#)
- [BNF Macrolides](#)
- [UKTIS: Macrolides in pregnancy](#)
- [Public Health England: Guidelines for the Public](#)
- [Health Management of Pertussis in England](#)
- [BUMPS: Macrolides in pregnancy](#)
- [BUMPS: Azithromycin](#)
- [BUMPS: Clarithromycin](#)

Guidance on ordering and prescribing unlicensed imports

13. The following specialist importers have confirmed they can source unlicensed erythromycin 250mg gastro-resistant tablets (please note there may be other companies that can also source supplies):
 - Alium Medical
14. Any decision to prescribe an unlicensed medicine must consider the relevant guidance and Health Board or local governance procedures. Unlicensed imports do not undergo any central quality assessment or suitability evaluation. Therefore, any import must be locally assessed in line with local unlicensed medicines processes.
15. Please see the links below for further information:
 - [The supply of unlicensed medicinal products](#), Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
 - [Professional Guidance for the Procurement and Supply of Specials](#), Royal Pharmaceutical Society
 - [Prescribing unlicensed medicines](#), General Medical Council (GMC).

Advice on managing the supply of antibiotics

16. Reserve supplies of liquid antibiotics for people where doses cannot be measured using a whole tablet or capsule. Where tablets or capsules can be used, then they should be considered the first line option.
17. Refer to **Specialist Pharmacy Service** resource for guidance on using solid oral dosage forms in children – advice can be found [here](#).
18. **Assess all children aged 5 years and over for ability to swallow solid oral dosage forms before opening, crushing or dispersing tablets or capsules.**
19. Further advice on swallowing pills along with practical information for parents and carers can be found [here](#)

Specialist Pharmacy Service (SPS) website

20. The UK Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in conjunction with SPS have launched an online Medicines Supply Tool, which provides up to date information about medicine supply issues. To access the online Medicines Supply Tool you need to register with the [SPS website](#). Registration for access to the website is available to UK healthcare professionals and organisations providing NHS healthcare. The tool is located under the Tools tab and then click on the Medicines Supply option.
21. We encourage prescribers, pharmacy professionals, and pharmacy procurement leads in Scotland to register with the SPS website and use its Medicine Supply Tool to stay up to date concerning medicines supply disruptions. Please be aware that while medicines supply issues will appear on the SPS website, some of the recommended actions may not always be appropriate / relevant within the Scottish context.

Enquiries

22. Enquiries from Health Boards or healthcare professionals should be directed in the first instance to PharmacyTeam@gov.scot (primary care) or NSS.NHSSMedicineShortages@nhs.scot (secondary care).