



15 September 2023

Medicine Supply Alert Notice

Permethrin 5% w/w cream

Priority: Level 2*
Valid until: further notice

Issue

1. Permethrin 5% w/w cream is in limited supply until further notice due to an increase in demand.
2. Unlicensed supplies of permethrin 5% cream may be sourced, lead times vary.
3. Malathion liquid, an alternative to permethrin for treatment of scabies, is currently unavailable.
4. Crotamiton 10% Cream (Eurax), which is licensed for the treatment of scabies, remains available but can only meet its current demand for other conditions.
5. Benzyl benzoate 25% topical emulsion can be sourced from special-order manufacturers; this is an unlicensed medicine.
6. Ivermectin 3mg tablets are licensed for treatment of scabies but are not currently marketed in the UK. Unlicensed supplies of ivermectin 3mg tablets may be sourced, lead times vary.

Advice and Actions

Managing cases of scabies

7. Clinicians in primary and secondary care should refer to [NICE treatment guidance](#) for indication of use for permethrin 5% w/w cream.
8. General advice on Standard Infection Control Precautions (SICPs) and Transmission based Precautions (TBPs) can be found in the [National Infection Prevention and Control Manual \(NIPCM\)](#):

Managing contacts of scabies cases

9. Treatment is indicated for close contacts of diagnosed scabies cases, even if the contact has no symptoms.
10. Contacts are defined as anyone who has close physical contact with the case without appropriate PPE, for example, providing personal care with skin-to-skin contact, sharing a room or other similar household setting, and sexual partners, within the 8 weeks prior to diagnosis.

Managing suspected clusters of scabies

11. In the event of suspected scabies clusters, defined as two or more linked cases of scabies within an 8 week period, clinicians in primary and secondary care should notify:

- Infection Prevention and Control Teams (IPCTs) for clusters in secondary care settings e.g. hospital wards
- [Health Protection Teams \(HPTs\)](#) for clusters in community settings e.g. schools, prisons or care homes

12. Following investigation of suspected clusters, treatment of additional contacts and co-ordination of treatment may be recommended by HPTs or IPCTs.
13. Further advice on the management of scabies outbreaks can be found in [Scabies: management advice for health professionals - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

Prioritisation of treatment

14. Where scabies has been diagnosed and where individuals have been confirmed as contacts:
- Existing stock of permethrin 5% cream should be reserved for these patients.
 - In secondary care, where there are insufficient stocks. Health boards should look to consider mutual aid.
 - If licensed permethrin 5% cream is unavailable, prescribe unlicensed permethrin 5 % cream.
 - Where permethrin 5% cream is unavailable, consider prescribing unlicensed special-order benzyl benzoate 25% emulsion if locally available.
 - If both alternatives are unavailable, consider prescribing unlicensed ivermectin 3mg tablets.
 - For all unlicensed alternatives, prescribers should work with local pharmacy teams to ensure orders are placed with special-order manufacturers within appropriate time frames as lead times may vary.
15. For further details on alternatives see additional information below.
16. To maximise the utility of limited supplies, case and contacts should receive advice on how to apply the product, the frequency and duration of treatment.
17. Additional information for patients and others can be found on [Scabies | NHS inform](#)

Additional Information

Guidance on ordering and prescribing unlicensed imports

18. The following specialist importers have confirmed they can source unlicensed permethrin 5% cream (please note there may be other companies that can also source supplies):
- Orifarm
19. The following special-order manufacturers have confirmed they can manufacture unlicensed benzyl benzoate emulsion (please note there may be other companies that can also source supplies):
- Eaststone
 - Target Healthcare

20. Any decision to prescribe an unlicensed medicine must consider the relevant regulatory, professional and Board guidance and local governance procedures. 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)

Links

- [SPC Permethrin 5% w/w Cream](#)
- [BNF – Drugs for scabies and head lice](#)
- [UKHSA guidance on the management of scabies cases and outbreaks in long-term care facilities and other closed settings](#)
- [CKS: Scabies](#)
- [BASHH 2016 UK National Guideline on the Management of Scabies](#) [European guideline for the management of scabies](#)
- [American Academy of Dermatology Association. Scabies: diagnosis and treatment](#) [Health Products Regulatory Authority: Datasheet benzyl benzoate](#)
- [Ivermectin 3mg tablets](#)

Treatment for scabies

Product	UK Licence	Indication	Method of application	Comments
Permethrin 5% w/w cream	Yes	Treatment of scabies for adults and children 2 months of age and above.	~ 90% individuals cured after single application. If there are no signs of original lesions healing or if new lesions have appeared, second application can be made not less than 7 days after first application.	First line agent. Considered suitable for use in pregnancy and breastfeeding.
Benzyl benzoate 25% w/v Application Cutaneous Emulsion	No (but licensed in Republic of Ireland (Rol)) Available from special-order manufacturers (see guidance on ordering and prescribing below)	Treatment of scabies in adults, children and infants.	Applied to entire body at night from soles of feet, omitting head and neck (although BNF considers that application should be extended to scalp, neck, face, and ears), for 2 consecutive nights. It is left in place for 8-12 hours on each night and may be followed by a repeated application at night 7 days later. It may be diluted with equal quantity of water for older children and with three parts of water for infants to minimise risk of irritation, although this also reduces efficacy.	Generally, no longer recommended as not as effective as permethrin or malathion and may cause skin irritation. The SmPC for the licensed Rol product states although no studies on effects on human pregnancy or lactation have been carried out, drug is for topical use and is unlikely to represent a hazard to the pregnant or lactating patient. Irritant to eyes and mucous membranes and may be irritant to skin. Hypersensitivity reactions have been reported. Systemic symptoms have been reported following excessive topical use. BNF advises avoid in children.

Product	UK Licence	Indication	Method of application	Comments
Ivermectin 3mg tablets	Licensed product is not currently marketed in the UK but unlicensed imports available.	Treatment of human sarcoptic scabies. Treatment is justified when the diagnosis of scabies has been established clinically and/or by parasitological examination. Without formal diagnosis treatment is not justified in cases of pruritus.	The recommended dosage is a single oral dose to provide ivermectin 200 microgram/kg body weight (e.g. 12mg [4 tablets] for a 60kg patient). <u>Common scabies</u> Recovery will be considered as definite only after 4 weeks from the treatment. Persistence of pruritus or scraping lesions does not justify a second treatment before this date. Administration of a second dose within 2 weeks after the initial dose should only be considered: a) when new specific lesions occur, b) when the parasitologic examination is positive at this date. <u>Profuse and crusting scabies</u> In these heavily infected forms, a second dose within 8 to 15 days of ivermectin and/or concomitant topical therapy may be necessary to obtain recovery.	Note: Ivermectin tablets are now a licensed product, although sources like the BNF, CKS, and UKHSA guidance have yet to update to reflect this, and still describe oral ivermectin as an unlicensed product. Link to Summary of Product Characteristics.

Specialist Pharmacy Service (SPS) website

21. 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.
22. 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.
23. We encourage prescribers, pharmacy professionals, and pharmacy procurement leads in Scotland to register with the SPS website and use its Medicine Supply Tool in order to stay up to date concerning medicines supply disruptions.
24. 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

25. 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).