



30 May 2024

Medicine Supply Alert Notice

Clarithromycin 125mg/5ml and 250mg/5ml oral suspensions

Priority: Level 2*
Valid until: TBC

Issue

1. Shortages have been reported for clarithromycin 125mg/5ml and 250mg/5ml oral suspensions.
2. Additional stock of clarithromycin 250mg/5ml is expected to be available in wholesalers from 24 May, and clarithromycin 125mg/5ml available from the 29 May 2024.
3. Note that the two UK-wide Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) for clarithromycin 125mg/5ml and 250mg/5ml oral suspension (ref [SSP053](#) and [SSP054](#)) were reactivated on 22nd May 2024, with the new end date for both SSPs set for the 21 June 2024.

Advice and Actions

Actions for pharmacists:

4. Where a prescription for clarithromycin 125mg/5ml or 250mg/5ml oral suspension is presented and cannot be fulfilled community pharmacists and dispensing doctors should:
 - supply an alternative clarithromycin preparation where available and according to the products specified in [SSP053](#) or [SSP054](#);
 - ensure the patients age, weight (where appropriate), cautions and exclusion criteria are considered when considering using an SSP;
 - ensure patients/parents/carers are counselled regarding any switch in formulation including the appropriate dose and volume of the substitute product;
 - ensure the patient's prescriber and/or GP practice is notified when supplying a patient in accordance with any of these SSPs; and
 - if the patient is deemed ineligible or does not consent to receive an alternative product via the SSP, they should be promptly referred to the prescriber.

Actions for prescribers:

5. Remaining clarithromycin oral suspensions should be reserved for patients prescribed doses lower than clarithromycin 250mg as these doses cannot be substituted with the 250mg tablets.
 - consider use of clarithromycin tablets in the first instance if suitable (see Additional information below);

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

- if clarithromycin tablets are not suitable, and clarithromycin is the most appropriate antibiotic, consider prescribing clarithromycin oral suspension, working with local pharmacy teams to understand availability; and
- if the above options are unsuitable or unavailable, or the patient is ineligible or does not consent to receive the product via the SSP, consider prescribing an alternative antibiotic considering any allergies and referring to local guidance.

Additional Information

Clinical Information

6. Clarithromycin is a macrolide antibiotic used in the treatment of infections caused by aerobic and anaerobic gram-positive and gram-negative organisms, as well as certain atypical organisms that do not respond to beta-lactams. It is also a potential treatment option in penicillin-allergic patients.
7. Clarithromycin oral suspension is licensed for use in children aged 6 months to 12 years. Clarithromycin tablets are unlicensed in children under 12 years, so use of the tablets in this age group would be considered “off-label”.
8. Where children are unable to swallow solid oral dosage forms of antibiotics, SPS have provided [advice](#) on crushing or dispersing immediate release clarithromycin tablets (off label manipulation).
9. Consideration should be given to local and [national](#) guidance on antimicrobial prescribing.

Links to further information:

- [NHSBSA Serious Shortage Protocols](#)
- [SmPCs clarithromycin](#)
- [BNF interactions clarithromycin](#)
- [BNF side effects clarithromycin](#)

Advice on managing supply antibiotics

10. Reserve supplies of liquid antibiotics for patients 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.
11. Refer to **Specialist Pharmacy Service** resource for guidance on using solid oral dosage forms in children – advice can be found [here](#).
12. **Assess all patients aged 5 years and over for ability to swallow solid oral dosage forms before opening, crushing or dispersing tablets or capsules.**
13. Further advice on swallowing pills along with practical information for parents and carers can be found [here](#)

Specialist Pharmacy Service (SPS) website

14. 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.

15. 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

16. 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).