

Safe management of electronically transmitted prescriptions during COVID-19- keeping patients safe and prescribers and pharmacists in step

The Victorian Medicines and Poisons Regulations released Public Health Emergency Order #4 (PHEO #4) which amends legislation to enable the legal dispensing of Schedule 4 medicines from a digital image transmitted electronically. There are limitations and requirements to maintain accountability and safety for patients. The order is in place until 6 October 2020.	
Note: Schedule 8 and Schedule 4 drugs of dependence (includes benzodiazepines, anabolic steroids, phentermine) are not covered by these amendments	
Key requirements	
Prescribers	Pharmacists
If electronic transmission is used: Do not send the paper prescription to the pharmacy or patient to avoid risk of duplicating supply.	If paper copy is sent post transmission: Do not reprocess – endorse as supplied and keep apart for return to prescriber when practical.
Electronic transmission must be directly to patient’s pharmacy (not to the patient or intermediary)	Print a copy of the digital image. Dispense and claim from digital image Repeat authorisations are attached to the printed copy of digital image and retained in pharmacy for subsequent supplies
The digital image must include the prescriber’s signature (normal or valid digital signature) and barcode if appropriate.	Cannot dispense if no signature
Authority Prescriptions must include relevant PBS authority number on the digital image. Do not send the paper prescription	
Include patient’s phone number for contact by the pharmacist (for safety)	Contact patients as necessary for stock availability, safe supply, collection/delivery.
Record in patient notes that transmission occurred under PHEO #4	Record in patient notes that supply on digital image occurred under PHEO #4
Retain the original prescription (paper or electronic copy) in a safe and secure way for 2 years, retrievable for audit	Retain a copy of the digital image in a safe and secure way for 2 years, retrievable for audit.
Delivery: Patients requiring delivery of medicines should discuss available options with their pharmacy. Delivery via the government funded Home Medicines Service is limited to eligible patients (in self-isolation or at risk of COVID-19) and can be accessed once a month only. This service is available at participating pharmacies only.	
For Schedule 8 and Schedule 4 drugs of dependence A pharmacist may dispense Schedule 8 medicine or Schedule 4 drug of dependence in accordance with a verbal instruction from the prescriber in an emergency. The prescriber must forward a paper prescription to the pharmacy as soon as practicable, confirming the instruction.	
SafeScript Prescribers and pharmacists must take all reasonable steps to check SafeScript when prescribing or dispensing monitored medicines	
More information on Victorian legislative amendments is available on the Medicines and Poisons Regulations website	
More information on COVID-19 Supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits Amendment Special Arrangement 7 April 2020	

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