

Guide for Volunteers supporting shielded or self-isolating people during the Covid-19 pandemic

# Background

Many people with long term conditions such as heart disease, lung disease and diabetes are prescribed medicines that they need to take regularly. Once a prescriber has decided that the medicine will be needed in the longer term, it is put onto a list of regular medicines known as a “repeat prescription”. In Cheshire, most repeat prescriptions are issued at monthly intervals.

In usual circumstances the repeat prescription process is as follows:

**Patient orders a repeat prescription** from their doctor’s surgery.

There is a range of options for ordering repeat prescriptions including:

* Ordering online or using an App (e.g. the NHS App)
* Dropping off a repeat prescription request at the practice
* Dropping off a repeat prescription request at the pharmacy.

Some practices allow some people to order their repeat prescriptions by telephone, but this is often discouraged or limited to certain groups (e.g. people who are housebound and can’t use online services)

**The surgery checks the repeat prescription** request.

Checks will include:

* Is each medicine still appropriate for the patient?
* Does the patient need a review or tests (e.g. blood tests, blood pressure)?
* Is each medicine being ordered early or more often than expected?

If the prescriber is satisfied that the repeat prescription can be issued without seeing the patient, the repeat prescription is issued and signed (as a paper copy) or issued and signed electronically (as an electronic prescription)

**The Prescription is sent to the pharmacy**

* Some patients collect the printed prescription and take it to the pharmacy of their choice
* Some prescriptions are sent electronically to the pharmacy of the patient’s choice

The pharmacy will check the prescription and make sure they have all the information they need to dispense each medicine safely. Some pharmacies dispense all the medicines in store, and some send prescriptions to a central hub for dispensing

**The Prescription is dispensed**

Pharmacy staff will dispense the medicines on the repeat prescription, and all the medicines are placed in a bag ready for collection (apart from medicines that need to be kept in special circumstances such as in a fridge).

If the medicines have been dispensed at a hub, they will be return to the local pharmacy for collection.

Pharmacies may:

* Send a text message to the person to let them know that their prescription is ready
* Arrange a delivery service for people who can’t collect their prescriptions
* Keep the dispensed medicines at the pharmacy for a period of time awaiting collection
* Post the items to the patient (if the pharmacy is an online or “distance selling” pharmacy

**The Prescription is collected or delivered**

When collecting a prescription, pharmacies will need to know the name and address of the person the medicines are for, and their exemption status

If one of the medicines is a “controlled drug” (such as a strong pain killer), pharmacy staff will ask the person collecting the medicines for some identification and will usually request a signature to say the medicine has been collected

Pharmacy staff will check if the patient needs to pay for their prescription. Patients who don’t pay the prescription charge may be asked to sign the back of the prescription form. People who pay the prescription charge will pay £9.15 per item (from the 1 April 2020), or they can get a pre-payment certificate.

When delivering medication, pharmacy delivery drivers will make sure that the patient is in to receive the medicines and check that they are delivered correctly – medicines can’t be left in a “safe place” like some post.

If medicines are delivered by Royal Mail from an online or distance selling pharmacy and they can’t be delivered safely, the Royal Mail staff will leave a card explaining how to arrange collection or a repeat delivery.

This process can take several days to complete; patients are usually asked to order their repeat prescription from the doctor’s surgery 7-10 days before they need the medication.

## Repeat Prescriptions and the Coronavirus pandemic

The Coronavirus pandemic is making the NHS and other health and social care services review the way that they provide services to patients.

Some extremely vulnerable patients have been identified and asked to “shield” themselves to reduce the risk of them catching the coronavirus and becoming unwell. This means that they should stay at home and avoid all contact with people outside their household until advised otherwise.

Other people have been asked to stay at home because they are ill or are likely to have been exposed to the coronavirus. During this time, people are expected to stay at home and avoid all contact with people outside the household for at least 7 days (for those with coronavirus symptoms) or at least 14 days (for those people who have been in contact with coronavirus). This is known as “self-isolation” and should be strictly observed. People who need medical help during this time should contact the [NHS 111 online coronavirus service](https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19) or call NHS 111.

Everyone else should stay at home as much as possible, only leaving the house for 1 of 4 reasons:

* Shopping for basic necessities, for example food and medicine, which must be as infrequently as possible
* One form of exercise a day, for example a run, walk or cycle – alone or with members of your household
* Any medical need, or to provide care or to help a vulnerable person
* Travelling to and from work, but only where this absolutely cannot be done from home.

During this period, general practice and community pharmacy are limiting face to face contact with patients to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus.

Many patients who cannot leave their homes (e.g. if shielded or self-isolating) or who cannot get to a pharmacy (e.g. if they usually use public transport and this is no longer running) will need to order and receive their usual repeat medicines during the coronavirus pandemic.

NHS Cheshire CCG is working with Cheshire East Local Authority, Cheshire West and Chester Local Authority and local surgeries and pharmacies to support volunteers to help people get the medicines they need. “People helping People”

This is in addition to delivery services offered by community pharmacy and to national schemes such as the Good Sam App

Local Cheshire volunteers should not be asked to participate in ordering or collecting and delivery of medication unless they are “Gold” or “Silver” volunteers with an accreditation such as a current DBS check. Volunteers should not undertake any collection or delivery duties if they are currently showing symptoms of coronavirus or have been in contact with a known or suspected case and should be in self-isolation. In the event that self-isolation of a volunteer is required, they should contact the patient and inform the “People helping People” service as soon as possible once in self isolation.

**Prompting patients to order their repeat prescriptions.** Some people may need a reminder to order their repeat prescriptions from the surgery 7-10 days ahead of when they will need their next supply. Repeat prescriptions can be ordered in number of ways.

* Online or using an App – see [Health Services you can access online](https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/gps/gp-online-services/) on the NHS website
* Some surgeries will accept telephone request for repeat prescriptions during the Coronavirus pandemic, even if they don’t usually allow this.
* Some patients may be able to use a repeat prescription request slip, and either post this to their surgery or ask a volunteer to drop it off for them.
* Some patients may be able to set up a trusted family member or friend to order on their behalf. It is not recommended that the volunteer helpers register for this service, but they may need to ask for the contact details of the family member who orders the medication so that they can ask for a request to be made.

**Checking that the pharmacy has received the repeat prescription.** Volunteers should not need to collect a printed prescription from the surgery to take to the pharmacy. However, they may wish to check that the pharmacy has received the prescription. Prescriptions can be sent electronically to community pharmacy in one of 2 ways:

* As a repeat prescription – this is issued each month by the practice and sent electronically to the pharmacy. This will usually be the case if people have more than 4 medicines on their lists. In this case the surgery needs to be contacted each time (usually monthly).
* As a repeat dispensing item – this is where the surgery issues a “batch” of prescriptions to the pharmacy to cover a period of several months. The patient needs to contact the surgery for the first issue, and then each month afterwards will only need to contact the pharmacy. For more information the guide to [Explaining repeat dispensing to patients](https://digital.nhs.uk/services/electronic-prescription-service/explaining-electronic-repeat-dispensing-to-patients) on the NHS Digital website.

**Collecting the dispensed medicines from the pharmacy.** The patient may be informed by the pharmacy that dispensed medicines are ready to collect, or the volunteer may contact the pharmacy directly, depending on agreement. The volunteer should present to the pharmacy and:

* Give the name and address of the patient(s) they are collecting medicines for
* Be prepared to show their identification that shows that they are “Gold” or “Silver” members of the People helping People scheme
* Ideally, they would have evidence that the patient has given permission for them to collect the medicines on their behalf – for example a text message requesting the collection
* If any of the medicines is a Controlled Drug (such as a strong pain killer), it is likely that the volunteer will be asked for further identification (e.g. a driving licence) and will be asked to sign for receipt of the medication. Volunteers should make sure they have their own pen to use for this, to reduce the risk of catching coronavirus from a shared pen
* Ask if any of the dispensed items have any special storage requirements (e.g. need to be kept in a fridge) that would affect delivery times
* If the patient does not pay for their prescriptions it is possible that the volunteer will be asked to complete the exemption statement. Patients should be asked to share information relating to exemptions with the volunteer (for example if the patient is in receipt of Universal credit). Find out who is eligible for free prescriptions on the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/help-with-health-costs/get-help-with-prescription-costs/>
* If the patient pays for their prescriptions, they will need to come to an agreement with the volunteer about how the money will be transferred from the patient to the volunteer and then the pharmacy.

**Delivering the dispensed items to the patient.** The volunteer should always plan to collect the medicines and deliver to the patient within a single day. The following process should be followed.

* Phone the patient prior to delivery to advise them they are on the way (expected time if possible)
* Knock on the door
* Step 2 metres away
* Identify themselves and advise the patient that they are delivering medicines
* Ask the patient to confirm their name and address and once confirmed ask them to close door again
* Leave the medication(s) on door step and retreat to 2m distance
* Observe patient pick up delivery.

If the volunteer is unable to make delivery a second delivery can be attempted later in the day .If the volunteer cannot make the delivery directly to a member of the household they must not:

* Post the delivery items through letter boxes
* Leave the delivery items, unattended in porches or on doorsteps
* Leave with children (under 16 years of age) or with neighbours - unless advised otherwise by the patient in advance

After the second attempt ALL medicines undelivered must be returned to the pharmacy before it closes (or when operating reduced opening hours, before the Responsible Pharmacist signs out).

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