Medication Expiry Dates

NHS
Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys
NHS Foundation Trust

Definition

The expiry date of a medication is the date after which it may not be safe or as effective and is not suitable for administration to a patient.

The expiry date of an original product is determined by the manufacturer – for some products, the "in use" expiry date is shorter than this and is determined by the date of dispensing, opening, modification (e.g. reconstitution) or removal from recommended storage (e.g. fridge).

The terms *"expiry date"*, *"use by"*, *"use before"* and *"do not use after"* are all used on medication to indicate the date after which it should not be used – a date in full, e.g. 31/3/28, is clear and specific; when the date is expressed as only a month/year it's meaning is determined by the term used with it, e.g.:

- Exp. Date/Do Not Use After: 03/2028 or March 2028 – means not to be used after **31st March 2028**
- Use by/before: 03/2028 or March 2028 – means not to be used after **28th February 2028**

First use of a product

The date opened must be added to all oral liquids, creams, ointments, eye / ear drops and nasal sprays when they are first opened / used.

Check for reduced "in use" expiry date

The manufacturer may indicate if a reduced expiry date applies once the original product is opened. This will be found on the packaging or container, for example using this symbol:

This example means an expiry date of 3 months after opening. If there is no manufacturer's guidance on the packaging, please follow the guidance in the table to the right.

Administration of medication

Check:
- [ ] Is the original pack open?
- [ ] Does the product have a reduced expiry after opening?
- [ ] Has a date of opening been added?
- [ ] Is the open product within the reduced expiry date, as set by the manufacturer or in the table to the right?

STOP:
If a date of opening and/or expiry cannot be determined, or the product has expired.
DO NOT USE.
Quarantine in the pharmacy returns area and order a new supply

Medication type	In-use expiry date
Oral liquids dispensed in original bottle	Manufacturer expiry date unless manufacturer advises shortened expiry after first opening.
Reconstituted antibiotic suspensions	7 or 14 days from reconstitution, depending on product.
Oral liquids dispensed into a brown bottle by pharmacy	6 months from date of dispensing (on label), unless otherwise indicated by pharmacy.
Creams/Ointments Tube/pump dispensers/tubs *	Manufacturer expiry date unless manufacturer advises shortened expiry after first opening.
External liquids such as lotions, shampoos & bath oils dispensed in original containers.	Manufacturer expiry date unless manufacturer advises shortened expiry after first opening.
Antibiotic eye preparations	7 days from date of opening
Eye drops/ointment	28 days from date of opening (some new preparations are stable for longer – check packaging)
Eye drops for oral use (e.g. Atropine)	90 days from date of opening
Ear drops/nasal spray	3 months unless manufacturer advises shortened expiry after first opening.
Insulin	4 weeks from date of opening or removal from fridge, unless manufacturer advises otherwise
Loose **whole** tablets or capsules dispensed into a brown bottle by pharmacy	6 months from date of dispensing, unless otherwise indicated by pharmacy.
Loose **halved** tablets dispensed into a brown bottle by pharmacy	8 weeks from date of dispensing, unless otherwise indicated by pharmacy
Monitored dosage systems (MDS) e.g. medipacks	8 weeks from date of dispensing, unless otherwise indicated by pharmacy.

* Creams/Ointments: Tube/pump dispensers/tubs – gloves must be worn when removing cream/ointment. If there is obvious damage to the container or contamination, please destroy. If the supplied pack lasts longer than 3 months, consider requesting a smaller pack size.

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