



## Medication Safety Series: MSS16

### Medication Expiry Dates

#### Definition

The expiry date of a medication is the point in time 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. 31/3/22, 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: 03/2022 or March 2022 – means not to be used after **31<sup>st</sup> March 2022**
- Use by/before: 03/2022 or March 2022 – means not to be used after **28<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

#### 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.

A reduced expiry also applies to a product removed from its normal storage conditions, either intentionally or accidentally. The pharmacy team will apply a reduced expiry date to fridge products when an unintentional temperature excursion outside the normal range has occurred.

#### 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 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 below.

#### 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 below?

**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

#### Guide to “in use” expiry date (if not stated by the manufacturer)

Medication type	Expiry date
Oral liquids in original bottle <i>(exc. reconstituted antibiotic suspensions)</i>	6 months (from date of opening)
Oral liquids dispensed into a brown bottle by pharmacy	6 months (from date of dispensing)
Pump dispensers / tubes / tubs of creams & ointments	3 months (from date of opening)
Antibiotic eye preparations	7 days (from date of opening)
Insulin	4 weeks (from date of opening or removal from fridge)
Loose tablets or capsules dispensed into a brown bottle by pharmacy	6 months (from date of dispensing)

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