

**From the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer
Professor Cathy Harrison**



FOR ACTION

Deputy Secretary, Strategic Planning and Performance Group (*for onward transmission to relevant staff*)

Chief Executive, Business Services Organisation (*for onward transmission to relevant staff*)

Assistant Director of Integrated Care, Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, SPPG (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*).

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Dear Colleagues,

SERIOUS SHORTAGE PROTOCOL– CEFALEXIN 500MG TABLETS

Serious shortage protocols (SSPs) under the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 (HMRs) are an additional tool to manage and mitigate medicines shortages. An SSP enables community pharmacists to supply a specified medicine in accordance with a protocol rather than a prescription, without needing to seek authorisation from the prescriber, saving time for patients, pharmacists and prescribers. They are used in the case of a serious shortage, where a medicine would be likely to be out of stock for some time, and if, in the opinion of ministers, it would help manage the supply situation.

I am writing to inform you that in response to supply concerns across the UK regarding the availability of **cefalexin 500mg tablets**, the Department of Health of Social Care (DHSC) has today issued an SSP.

Effective from today, [SSP072](#) provides that for **every cefalexin 500mg tablet originally prescribed, one cefalexin 500mg capsule can be supplied.**

This SSP is due to expire on **Friday 27 September 2024**. Pharmacists should refer to the latest version of this SSP which is available on the Business Services Organisation (BSO) dedicated page on its website:

<https://bso.hscni.net/directorates/operations/family-practitioner-services/pharmacy/contractor-information/drug-tariff-and-related-materials/serious-shortage-protocols-ssps/>.

SSP072, authorised by the Secretary of State on behalf of the four UK nations, has been developed by clinicians and provides pharmacists with procedures to follow in providing this suitable alternative product to help reduce the number of patients having to return to their prescriber for a replacement prescription.

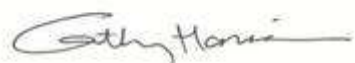
Key Points:

- **SSP072** only allows the substitution of cefalexin 500mg tablets for cefalexin 500mg capsules and does not allow for the quantity supplied to be less than the number of days prescribed on the original prescription.
- Ensure that the patient/carer is aware that the capsule form of cefalexin may contain gelatine. Pharmacists may wish to check the patient information leaflet or summary product characteristics if patients are concerned.
- Community pharmacists should use their professional skill and judgement to decide whether it is reasonable and appropriate to substitute the patient's prescribed order for a supply under this SSP. The patient/carer will also need to agree to supply under the SSP.
- Pharmacists do not need to routinely notify the prescriber and/or GP practice where an alternative pharmaceutical form has been supplied under an SSP. Please refer to '[Outline of Operational Guidance for Dispensers in response to issue of a Serious Shortage Protocol](#)' on the BSO website for more information.
- If a patient/carer declines to receive the medicine under these protocols, the pharmacist should use their professional judgement to determine if other courses of action are appropriate whilst taking into consideration wider supply issues. If this does not address their concerns, the patient/carer should be referred back to their prescriber for advice.

Action Required

All relevant staff should be made aware of this SSP. I would ask the SPPG to bring this information to the attention of GP Practices and Community Pharmacists directly.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer