

Advance Prescriptions for Oral COVID-19 Antiviral Medicines

Guidance for relevant appropriately qualified prescribers and pharmacists

The purpose of this guidance document is to:

1. Clarify when and why Advance Prescriptions may be appropriate; and
2. Provide additional guidance and support for prescribers and pharmacists.

Background

This was one of several initiatives designed to improve timeliness of access to COVID-19 antivirals for those who need them. Other changes that were implemented, include the reclassification of these medicines from “prescription-only” to “restricted” or “pharmacist-only” medicines, enabling pharmacists to supply the medicines to eligible patients without a prescription from a prescriber.

Advance prescriptions can provide assurance to someone at high risk of severe COVID-19 related health outcomes that they will be able to access these COVID-19 antiviral medicines when needed, acknowledging the five-day window of effectiveness between symptom onset and time needed to initiate treatment.

Primary care teams will be able to identify people who would gain most benefit from an advance prescription. It is not expected that advance prescriptions will be issued for all those eligible for a COVID-19 antiviral medicine, it is aimed to be targeted for those deemed most clinically appropriate, at the discretion of the prescriber.

Situations where issuing of advance prescriptions may be particularly useful are:

- for patients who are at very high risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 soon e.g. patients who meet eligibility criteria, and who are household contacts but not yet symptomatic or COVID-19 positive.
- Patients who are travelling to other regions within New Zealand and may struggle to contact their usual health provider at that time.
- Patients who live in remote and rural areas and have limited availability of primary care or pharmacies that can provide antiviral medication without a prescription.

Consultation in advance provides an opportunity for an in-person or virtual conversation about how Paxlovid can support the management of COVID-19. The funding for an advance prescription is to be used when this is the sole focus of the consult. It also provides an opportunity to undertake any tests that would support the safe use of oral COVID-19 antiviral medicines, such as renal function when clinically indicated.

Eligibility

To be eligible for an advance prescription for oral COVID-19 antiviral medicine, the patient must meet [Pharmac eligibility criteria](#) other than 'Person has confirmed (or probable symptomatic COVID-19 or has symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and is a household contact of a positive case'.

For an advance prescription to be dispensed, the patient must meet ALL the [Pharmac eligibility criteria](#).

Advance prescriptions remain valid for 90 days, in line with existing Pharmac funding rules.

Clinical assessment

As is current practice, at each stage in the process, the responsible clinician will undertake a review to ensure it safe for the patient to take Paxlovid.

Advance prescriptions for oral COVID-19 antiviral medicines will not be clinically appropriate for some patients that meet the Pharmac eligibility criteria. There is no obligation for a clinician to issue an advance prescription.

Prescribing and endorsements

Prescribers must exercise their clinical judgement to consider whether it is appropriate to issue an advance prescription in relation to the patient's clinical situation. Considerations may include:

- What is the chance of a significant change in either renal function or other medicines in the next 90 days?
- Does the patient and/or whānau have a good understanding of how and when to use an advance prescription?

Prescribers must clearly include the following endorsements to streamline the processes if prescription needs to be dispensed:

1. 'Advance Prescription. Meets Pharmac eligibility criteria (other than the requirements relating to confirmed (or probable) symptomatic COVID-19
2. 'Not to be dispensed until diagnosed with COVID-19'.
3. Renal function information
4. Prescriber's contact details (including out of hours)

Before prescribing an advance prescription, prescribers should consider which pharmacy is most appropriate to receive it based on patient/whānau preferences and opening hours. Where domestic travel is planned consider providing the patient with a paper copy of the prescription. Healthpoint holds details of [pharmacies that can supply COVID-19 antivirals](#).

Expiry of an advance prescription

An advance prescription will expire 90 days after the prescription is issued, as per the Pharmac rules for prescriptions. It is therefore important to ensure patients are aware of this.

Dispensing

If a patient develops symptomatic COVID-19 and proceeds to fill the advance prescription, the pharmacist should undertake a clinical review including:

- Current clinical assessment – is the patient currently very unwell? Could there be an alternative diagnosis?
- Has the patient’s renal function or other regular medicines changed since the prescription was issued?
- Does the patient and/or whānau understand how to use the medicine, its side effects, when to seek medical advice and how to manage interactions with other medicines (if relevant)?
- Referral back to the prescriber may be necessary if the clinical situation has significantly changed since the prescription was issued.

If a patient has self-reported a positive RAT (rapid antigen tests), in My Health Record it can be seen in the COVID Care in the Community Module (CCCM) electronic system. If the patient has not yet self-reported their positive test, the pharmacist should encourage or assist them to do so.

Once dispensed, the COVID-19 antiviral medicine should be delivered to the patient’s home (or place of self-isolation) if required (i.e. if they do not have whānau or friends who can collect on their behalf).

Information for consumers

It is important for the prescriber and pharmacist to discuss with the patient the correct use of Paxlovid, its side effects, when to seek medical advice and how to manage interactions with other medicines (if relevant).

Interpreter services should be utilised where required. Whānau and others should be part of consultation as appropriate.

The importance of not sharing these medicines with family and friends should be emphasised.

Explaining to the patient that the advance prescription expires 90 days after it has been issued.

FAQ: Advance Prescriptions for Oral COVID-19 Antiviral Medicines (Paxlovid)

1. How is a ‘probable’ COVID-19 case defined?

The COVID-19 [case definitions](#) can also be found in the COVID-19 section of the Communicable Disease Control Manual.

2. Is there a list of pharmacies supplying Paxlovid?

Healthpoint has a list of [supplying pharmacies](#). (To search use: By Service, select 'Pharmacy;' Service Area, select 'COVID-19 antiviral medicines (if you have a prescription from your doctor or nurse)')

3. What if the patient is out of town when they get COVID-19?

The prescriber should consider any domestic travel plans when considering which pharmacy to send and advance prescription to.

If the prescription has been put 'on hold' by a pharmacy in the New Zealand electronic Prescription Service (NZePS), only that pharmacy can dispense it. This is a challenge if the 'on hold' pharmacy is closed when the patient requires the advance prescription.

In this situation an alternative is to obtain a pharmacist-initiated supply from a participating pharmacy.

Healthpoint has a [list of pharmacies](#) that are supplying COVID-19 antiviral medicines without a prescription. To search use: By Service, select 'Pharmacy;' Service Area, select 'COVID-19 antiviral medicines (if you have a prescription from your doctor or nurse)'

4. Can patients get an advance prescription dispensed prior to travel?

Patients cannot use advance prescriptions to access funded Paxlovid to take with them when travelling. To be eligible for funded Paxlovid the patient must meet all the Pharmac Eligibility criteria at the time of dispensing.

Privately funded Paxlovid is available for people wishing to obtain Paxlovid prior to travel.

5. Who can issue an advance prescription?

Any authorised prescriber within their area of practice, including a medical doctor, pharmacist prescriber, nurse practitioner, or designated (registered) nurse prescriber, may prescribe Paxlovid.

6. Is a general practice expected to identify all their potentially eligible patients?

There is no expectation that practices will proactively offer advance prescriptions to all their potentially eligible patients.

7. What if a patient is seeking Paxlovid privately?

If a patient is seeking privately funded Paxlovid, the prescription must be endorsed 'Non-funded.' The patient will have to pay the full cost of the medicine supply.

Summary – Advance prescriptions for Paxlovid

	Prescription in advance is sought	Clinical consultation	Medicine is prescribed	Medicine is dispensed
Who	Patient	Prescriber ¹		Pharmacist
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient contacts prescriber OR prescriber contacts patient • Contact may be using telehealth (video/phone) OR in-person as clinically appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct clinical review and medicine counselling² • Use telehealth OR in-person as clinically appropriate. • Explain the purpose and correct use of the advance prescription (set expectations) • If clinically appropriate, the clinician requests a renal function test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add endorsements to prescription: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'Advance Prescription. Meets Pharmac eligibility criteria (other than the requirements relating to confirmed (or probable) symptomatic COVID-19 2. 'Not to be dispensed until diagnosed with COVID-19'. 3. Renal function information 4. Prescriber's contact details • Select which pharmacy based on patient/whānau preference, domestic travel plans, opening hours³ • Issue prescription⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the patient meets ALL Pharmac eligibility criteria. • Conduct the appropriate clinical review⁵ • Encourage or support the patient to report their RAT result on My Health Record, as required. • Counsel the patient⁶ • Referral back to prescriber may be necessary if the clinical situation has changed since prescription was issued • Dispense Paxlovid
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation in-person in advance of becoming a COVID-19 case provides an opportunity to discuss these medicines for people who are unable to use or prefer not to use telehealth. • Utilise interpreter services where required. Include whānau and others as appropriate. • Reinforce the importance of not sharing Paxlovid with family and friends as it may be harmful to them 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicine may be delivered if required

Notes

¹ Any authorised prescriber within their area of practice i.e. medical doctor, pharmacist prescriber, nurse practitioner, , or designated (registered) nurse prescriber.

² All Pharmac eligibility criteria must be met EXCEPT the requirement for the person to have confirmed (or probable) symptomatic COVID-19, or symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and is a household contact of a positive case.

³ Healthpoint holds details of [pharmacies that can supply COVID-19 antivirals](#)

⁴ Advance prescriptions remain valid for 90 days.

⁵ Including assessment of symptoms, relevant laboratory results and current medicines.

⁶ Including how to use Paxlovid, its side effects, when to seek medical advice and how to manage interactions with other medicines (if relevant)