

Community Pharmacy Bulletin

Date: 27 March 2026

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Headline News

Easter 2026

Final hours for pharmacy, dental and optometry over Easter were shared with contractors, ICBs, CPLs and other interested parties on 19th March. Please ensure the poster attached to the email is displayed noting which pharmacies will be open over the Easter period in your area. If your pharmacy has shutters at the windows, please ensure that the opening hours poster is clearly visible to patients when the shutters are closed.

If your pharmacy will be open on Good Friday (3rd April) Easter Sunday (5th April) or Easter Monday (6th April) please update your hours via [Profile Manager](#) to ensure these are visible to 111 via DoS and to patients on NHS.UK, thank you to those pharmacies who have already updated their hours for these dates.

Regarding daily pick-up patient prescriptions - please remember to make suitable arrangements and ensure the prescriber is aware of your opening hours over Easter, especially if you are closed on the bank holidays. The final rotas will shortly be available on our web site to view, together with maps outlining the pharmacies open on the Bank Holidays in the region- [NHS England — South West » Pharmacy opening hours](#)

Thank you to all those pharmacies who will be open over the Easter period, as always, your support is appreciated.

Bank Holiday Resources for Opioid Treatment Programmes

Bank Holidays can be a particularly busy period for community pharmacies, and we know there can be additional challenges when managing opioid treatment programmes.

The Community Pharmacy Patient Safety Group (CPPSG) has developed two helpful resources based on insights from its members: a 'Focus on Methadone' video and a Bank Holiday Checklist. These tools are designed to support pharmacy teams in safely and effectively delivering opioid treatment programmes before, during and after the Bank Holiday period.

These resources are aimed at all pharmacy team members involved in providing opioid substitution services:

- Focus on Methadone video
- Bank Holiday Checklist: Opioid Treatment Programmes

[Bank Holiday resources – Community Pharmacy Patient Safety Group](#)

Pharmacy teams are reminded to continue following their Local Service Level Agreements, company SOPs, and professional guidance at all times.

Information for Pharmacy Teams: Meningococcal Disease Outbreak in Parts of Kent

We are aware that pharmacy teams across the country are receiving questions from patients regarding the recent outbreak of meningococcal disease in parts of Kent. We have the following information to share with you.

Patients may present at community pharmacies with NHS prescriptions for chemoprophylaxis. Community pharmacies must dispense the prescription in line with usual practice. There is no commissioned service for community pharmacy to initiate chemoprophylaxis for NHS patients.

A prescription charge exemption using the 'Free supply for specified use (FS)' endorsement has been approved for all prescriptions presented for this purpose. [Guidance on how prescribers should apply this endorsement and how pharmacy teams should correctly submit 'FS' endorsed prescriptions](#) can be found on the Community Pharmacy England website.

After the date an oral ciprofloxacin chemoprophylaxis prescription is dispensed and collected: If a patient from the affected cohort has already paid a prescription charge and requests a refund, they can write to the hc5refundquery@nhsbsa.nhs.uk to request a refund.

Patients should include a covering letter outlining their circumstances and their proof of payment, an FP57 or till receipt, where they retained this. Or they can telephone 0300 330 1343.

Signposting and advice: Worried students, parents, or members of the public may seek advice from their community pharmacy teams. If an individual believes they may have been exposed, please advise them to follow UKHSA instructions rather than seeking private antibiotics. Community Pharmacy teams are advised to remain vigilant for symptoms of meningococcal disease. Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Neck stiffness
- Photophobia
- Non-blanching rash
- Vomiting
- Confusion, drowsiness, or altered consciousness
- Limb pain, cold extremities, or mottled skin (potential early sign)

Anyone presenting with symptoms suggestive of meningitis (this could include patients referred into Pharmacy First through the usual pathways) or rapidly deteriorating illness, should be directed to urgent care via 999 or A&E for immediate emergency assessment. Any concerns should be documented and escalated through local clinical governance routes if appropriate.

Please ensure that all pharmacy staff are kept up to date on the most recent UKHSA guidelines regarding the management of this outbreak to support patient awareness and care navigation.

Thank you for continuing to support patients with clear, evidence-based information during this period of increased concern.

<https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2026/03/18/meningitis-b-outbreak-what-you-need-to-know/>
[UKHSA Blog: What is meningitis? Symptoms, risks and how to protect yourself](#)
[NHS.uk website: Meningitis](#)

Reminder: Change of Clinical Waste Provider for BSW Pharmacies – Effective 6 April 2026

All sites across BSW will transition to a new clinical waste provider from 6 April 2026. Please make sure you have reviewed the information sent to your NHS email accounts, which includes details about:

- Updated collection arrangements
- Your new clinical waste bins
- Any actions required ahead of the change

****For all other areas in the South West, there will be no change to your current arrangements.**

Updated South West Temporary Suspension Policy 01 April 2026

Please find attached a copy of the updated South West Community Pharmacy Local Policy for Temporary Suspension of Service v5.0. A summary of the key updates to the policy are included at the front of the document. Please ensure you read the updated policy and share the policy and additional resources with your pharmacy team.

This policy is to be implemented across the South West with effect from the **01 April 2026** and will supersede any previous versions of the policy. A copy of the SW Resilience Guide, display notices to support contractors who have closed and those contractors supporting locally when a contractor has had to close, are also attached for your use (all documents will be available to access [here](#) from the 01 April 2026).

Reminder for Pharmacies Signed Up to Provide Free COVID-19 Tests

We would like to remind all pharmacies that have signed up to deliver the Free COVID-19 Testing Service of the importance of maintaining an appropriate stock of test kits and ensuring the service is available whenever eligible patients present.

Patients who qualify for free tests are among the most clinically vulnerable, and it is essential that they are not encouraged to purchase tests privately when they are entitled to receive them free of charge. These patients should not be expected to travel to multiple locations to obtain tests, particularly when a pharmacy's NHS profile indicates that the service is being provided.

If your pharmacy is listed as offering the Free COVID-19 Testing Service, please ensure:

- You have an adequate supply of free test kits available.
- Eligible patients are provided with their free tests without being directed to purchase alternatives.
- The service is delivered in line with the commitments made when signing up to the scheme.

Maintaining accurate service availability and supporting vulnerable patients remains a key part of delivering safe, accessible NHS care.

Annual Complaints Return – Action Required by 30 April 2025

Under the National Health Service (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 2013, all pharmacy contractors are required to submit annual complaints report to the local Commissioning Team as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 March, marking the end of the reporting year.

We will be coming out to contractors shortly and we will share a CPE template that can be used to send in your annual complaints return

You may also use your own template, provided it includes all required information listed below.

Your annual report must include:

- The number of complaints received during the reporting period
- The number of complaints determined to be well-founded
- The number of complaints referred to the Health Service Commissioner under the 1993 Act

Your annual report must also summarise:

- The subject matter of the complaints received
- Any matters of general importance arising from those complaints or from the way they were handled
- Any actions taken or planned to improve services as a result of the complaints

The annual report for the period 01 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 must be submitted by 30 April 2026 to: england.pharmacysouthwest@nhs.net

Data Security & Protection Toolkit (DSPTK) 2026 – Community Pharmacy England Guidance – Action required by 30 June 2026

Community Pharmacy England has published updated guidance to support community pharmacy owners in completing the Data Security and Protection Toolkit (DSPTK) 2026. The Toolkit is used to make each pharmacy's annual information governance (IG) declaration and must be completed by Tuesday, 30 June 2026.

What's new in the 2026 Toolkit

- A new question confirming whether multi-factor authentication (MFA) is used with your clinical IT systems
- Improved layout for easier navigation
- Clearer question wording and enhanced pharmacy-specific tips
- Previous year's answers displayed for many questions, allowing teams to quickly confirm accuracy or update where needed
- Continued availability of the NHS Parent Organisation Code (POC) HQ batch submission feature, enabling owners of three or more pharmacies to complete a single submission for all premises

Recommended next steps

We strongly advise logging in to the Toolkit as soon as possible and reviewing the guidance documents—starting with the Toolkit Completion: Overview – Five Steps Guide. If capacity allows, pharmacy teams should begin completing the Toolkit early.

Important reminder: - All mandatory questions in the Toolkit must be completed as part of a pharmacy's NHS Terms of Service to meet minimum information governance requirements

Pharmacy owners can now watch a recording of Community Pharmacy England's recent online workshop to help with the completion of the <https://cpe.org.uk/our-work/updates-events/our-webinars/data-security-and-protection-ig-toolkit-workshop/>.

Amendment to temporary suspensions approved particulars

This is to give contractors advance notice of changes to the method of reporting temporary suspensions to their ICB.

Currently contractors can report via the Manage Your Service (MYS) platform or send an email notification to their ICB.

However, from 01 June 2026 MYS will be the only submission method and contractors must use it from that date. Once reported via MYS, contractors do not need to follow up with an email or further notification to their ICB.

The approved particulars will be updated on 01 June 2026 [to reflect this on the NHS England website](#)

Contractor Guidance: Dispensing Obligations and Drug Tariff Pricing

Contractors are reminded that a pharmacy is not entitled to decline the dispensing of a valid NHS prescription on the grounds that the current Drug Tariff reimbursement does not cover the acquisition cost of the medicine. Under the NHS contractual framework, and in line with professional and ethical standards, contractors must ensure that patients receive the medicines prescribed for them. Financial considerations must not compromise patient care or delay access to treatment.

Where contractors identify that the Drug Tariff price is significantly lower than the actual market cost, they should report this to Community Pharmacy England (CPE). CPE will gather the necessary data, investigate the issue, and, where appropriate, submit an application to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) for a price concession. This process exists specifically to support contractors experiencing exceptional purchasing costs.

It is essential to emphasise that pharmacies must not delay or refuse to dispense a prescribed medicine while awaiting the outcome of a potential price concession. Patient safety, continuity of treatment, and timely access to essential medicines must remain the overriding priorities. Contractors are expected to take all reasonable steps to obtain the medicine, liaise with the prescriber where clinically appropriate, and follow established escalation processes in cases of supply difficulty.

Refusing to dispense solely on the grounds of reimbursement level is not compatible with professional standards, the NHS contractual framework, or the duty of care owed to patients.

Guidance on Monitored Dosage Systems (MDS) and Local Resolution

The GPhC has issued guidance outlining the principles that support safe, person-centred decisions regarding the use of monitored dosage systems (MDS). This guidance provides a framework to help ensure that decisions around MDS are clinically appropriate, proportionate, and aligned with the individual needs of each patient.

Should any issues arise relating to the provision of MDS, we recommend that local resolution is sought in the first instance. This should include a discussion with the community pharmacy provider, with reference to the GPhC guidance, to support a constructive and patient-centred approach to resolving concerns.

Maintaining open communication and collaborative working between providers remains essential to ensuring safe and effective care for patients

Link to the Guidance [Monitored dosage systems | General Pharmaceutical Council](#)

Update for Community Pharmacies: Care Leavers' Entitlement to Free NHS Prescriptions, Dental Care and Eyecare

In December 2025, the Government announced that care leavers will become entitled to free NHS prescriptions, NHS dental treatment and NHS-funded eyecare. This is a confirmed policy commitment, but it is not yet active. The Government intends to introduce the required legislation and operational systems by the end of 2026. Further details on how care leavers will access these entitlements will be issued once national implementation plans are finalised.

What this means for community pharmacies right now

Care leavers are not yet automatically exempt, until the new arrangements come into force:

Care leavers must continue to pay NHS prescription charges unless they qualify for an existing exemption category.

Pharmacies should continue to check exemption status in the usual way; no new exemption box or category has been introduced at this stage.

Signpost to existing support

Care leavers can, check eligibility for help with health costs on [Help with health costs - NHS](#)

Speak to their Personal Adviser for information about any local authority support schemes that may help with prescription, dental or optical costs

No operational changes for pharmacies yet

No new FP10 exemption categories

No new system codes

No new processes for endorsing or submitting prescriptions

Pharmacies should continue to follow standard NHSBSA guidance.

Key message for pharmacy teams

Care leavers will receive free prescriptions, dental care and eyecare in the future, but the entitlement is not yet in place. Until the legislation and systems go live, care leavers should continue to pay NHS charges unless they meet an existing exemption.

We will share further updates as soon as national guidance becomes available.

Update for Community Pharmacies: Start of 2026/27 CPCF Negotiations

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has formally begun negotiations with Community Pharmacy England (CPE) on the 2026/27 Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF).

A letter initiating the process has now been issued to CPE, and detailed discussions are beginning immediately.

These negotiations will cover:

- Funding arrangements for 2026/27
- Potential service changes and developments
- Operational and contractual requirements
- Opportunities to shape longer-term plans for the sector

CPE has emphasised that, despite the tight timescales before the new financial year, it is essential to push for the strongest possible deal for community pharmacy. They have already set out the sector's priorities in a recent letter to the pharmacy minister and confirmed their negotiating positions at their February committee meeting.

Confidentiality of negotiations

Government rules require that the negotiation process remains confidential. This means CPE cannot share details during discussions, but they have committed to updating pharmacy owners as soon as outcomes are agreed, and to provide as much detail as possible.

Dispensing Services Quality Scheme (DSQS)

Thank you, those dispensing practices who have returned evidence for DSQS.

A reminder the deadline for all evidence to be submitted for DSQS is **31 March 2026**. You must ensure you have completed and submitted the following by this deadline:

- Clinical Dispensing Audit
- Self-Assessment Declaration Form
- DRUM Declaration Form (10% DRUMS target achieved)
- Reported any dispensary errors within the scheme year for the purpose of reviewing and learning

Please note we will **not** be chasing individual practices to submit evidence.

Failure to submit all the evidence required by the 31 March 2026 may result in the practice not receiving their DSQS payment.

Campaign Information

Stress Awareness Month – April

April marks Stress Awareness Month, a national campaign dedicated to increasing understanding of stress, its impact on wellbeing, and the simple steps we can all take to manage it more effectively.

Throughout the month, we encourage everyone to take a moment to reflect on their own wellbeing, recognise signs of stress early, and make use of the support available. Even small changes—regular breaks, staying active, connecting with others, and setting healthy boundaries—can make a meaningful difference.

Stress Awareness Month is also a reminder that no one has to manage stress alone. Please look out for colleagues, start conversations where you can, and make use of any wellbeing resources or support pathways available within the organisation.

Let's use April as an opportunity to promote a healthier, more supportive working environment for all.

This is not a mandatory campaign

World Immunization Week 2026-24–30 April

World Immunization Week takes place from 24–30 April and aims to highlight the importance of vaccines in protecting people of all ages against preventable diseases. This global campaign, led by the World Health Organization, encourages communities and healthcare teams to work together to improve vaccine confidence, uptake, and access.

Vaccination remains one of the most effective public health interventions, preventing millions of illnesses and deaths every year. World Immunization Week is an opportunity to recognise the vital role that immunisation plays in keeping our communities healthy, as well as the ongoing work of healthcare professionals who deliver these services.

This is not a mandatory campaign.

Bowel Cancer Awareness Month – April

April is Bowel Cancer Awareness Month, a time dedicated to increasing understanding of one of the UK's most common cancers. Bowel cancer affects thousands of people every year, yet outcomes are significantly better when it is detected early.

This month offers an opportunity to highlight the importance of recognising symptoms such as persistent changes in bowel habits, unexplained weight loss, abdominal discomfort, or blood in the stool. Encouraging early conversations and reducing hesitation around seeking medical advice can make a real difference.

It's also a reminder of the value of routine screening, which plays a crucial role in identifying issues before symptoms appear. Raising awareness helps empower people to take proactive steps in looking after their health and supports earlier diagnosis and better outcomes.

This is not a mandatory campaign

Useful Information

GDPR email requirements

We would like to remind all contractors that any email containing patient identifiable information must be sent from a secure email address, preferably the pharmacies shared generic nhs.net store email address. Any emails with patient details must not be sent from a non-secure email address as this could result in a breach of GDPR.

Email Correspondence – Signature Details

Please ensure that when communicating with the NHS South West Collaborative Commissioning Hub's Community Pharmacy Team you include the following details within your correspondence to help us respond to your enquiry. Many thanks.

- Contact Name
- Name of Contractor
- ODS Code (F Code)

Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs)

All current Serious Shortage Protocols can be viewed via [BSA website](#).

If you have any questions regarding SSPs please contact the NHS Prescription Service:

- Email: nhsbsa.prescriptionservices@nhsbsa.nhs.uk
 - Telephone: 0300 330 1349
 - Textphone: 18001 0300 330 1349
-

DHSC Medicine Supply Notifications

DHSC and NHSE/I have now launched an online [Medicines Supply Tool](#), which provides up to date information about medicine supply issues. The contents of these MSNs can now be viewed on the Tool. The Tool also details any changes to resupply dates and updates to the entries. To access the Tool, you will be required to register with the [SPS website](#).

The Medicine Supply Tool is moving on the SPS website. Update your links and bookmark its new home in the 'Tools' section: <https://www.sps.nhs.uk/home/tools/medicines-supply-tool/>

Medicine Alerts

For information on medical alerts, recalls and safety information regarding drugs and medical devices please see the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency below:

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Reporting a Temporary Suspension of Service

In accordance with regulations, contractors must notify the commissioner of any temporary suspension in service; including those for reasons due to illness or causes beyond the control of the contractor. In accordance with pharmacy regulations contractors must provide evidence to the commissioner that they have undertaken the following:

- Notified the commissioner of the suspension as soon as practical.
- Used all reasonable endeavors to implement the business continuity plan required by paragraph 29D, Schedule 4 of the NHS (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 2013, and
- Used all reasonable endeavors to resume the provision of pharmaceutical services as soon as is practicable. (Paragraph 23(10), Schedule 4, of the NHS (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 2013.

In the event of you being unable to open please complete a Temporary Suspension closure form via one of the following ways either:

1. via [Manage Your Service \(MYS\) portal](#).
2. Completing the Temporary Suspension Form found [here](#) titled Annex 18 and sending this to the SW generic email address: england.pharmacysouthwest@nhs.net.

Details of the new Temporary Suspension policy can be found [here](#) the new temporary suspension policy went live on the **01 of April 2025**.

Changes of director and/or superintendent pharmacist

When a body corporate appoints a new director and / or a new superintendent they must inform the commissioner within 30 days of the person taking up that new position. Recent experience suggests that contractors sometimes overlook making these declarations.

To make such a declaration you should go to the Primary Care Support England (PCSE) website at <https://pcse.england.nhs.uk/services/pharmacy-market-administration-services/market-entry/> where you will be able to complete the necessary declarations. Failure to notify any changes to directors and / or superintendent pharmacist maybe a breach of your terms of service.

NHSBSA Hints and Tips

Please see below the links to the NHSBSA website and a link for previous back copies

- [GP and Pharmacy support: open days, webinars and newsletters | NHSBSA](#)
 - <https://r1.dotdigital-pages.com/p/7R9K-79Q/sign-up-for-the-hints-tips-bulletin>
-

Pharmacy Support for Health & Wellbeing

Please see below support available for our NHS people with free confidential coaching and support for the primary care workforce.

- Wellbeing apps:
 - NHS staff have been given free access to a number of wellbeing apps to support their mental health and wellbeing.
 - Link: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/supporting-our-nhs-people/support-now/wellbeing-apps/>
 - Mental Health and Wellbeing:
 - Guidance and advice on how you can stay mentally healthy and boost your wellbeing from Pharmacists' Support.
 - Link: <https://pharmacistsupport.org/i-need-help-managing-my/mental-health-and-wellbeing/>
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Interpretation & Translation Services

Interpretation and translation services are available for Community Pharmacies when treating NHS Patients. These services are commissioned and paid for by NHS England.

The information and how to access these are available on the South West Pharmacy website page via the following link [NHS England — South West » Interpretation and Translation Services.](#)

The services commissioned cover the following areas:

- Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG)
 - Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon, and Wiltshire (BSW)
 - Cornwall & Isles of Scilly
 - Devon
 - Dorset
 - Gloucestershire
 - Somerset
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Contact Details and Further Information

South West Collaborative Commissioning Hub - Community Pharmacy Contract Management Team contact information: email: england.pharmacysouthwest@nhs.net.

Website: [South West Community Pharmacy information](#) for more further information, blank templates, forms, and documents.

Please report any controlled drug incidents to us via our reporting website www.cdreporting.co.uk
The NHSE SW Controlled Drugs Team can be contacted at ENGLAND.southwestcontrolleddrugs@nhs.net

Improving the Visibility of Our Emails – We Want Your Input

We are reviewing how we communicate with contractors and would really value your feedback on how we can make our emails clearer, more visible, and easier to action.

We know that inboxes are busy, and important messages can sometimes be missed. To help us improve, we would like to understand:

- What makes an email stand out to you?
- What subject-line wording prompts you to open and act on a message quickly?
- Are there particular formats, tags, or phrases that help you identify priority communications?
- Is there anything we could change in the way we structure or present information to make it easier to digest?

As the South West Collaborative Commissioning Hub, we are keen to refine the emails we send directly. While we cannot change the content or subject lines of emails that external teams ask us to circulate, we can improve the communications we produce ourselves — and your insight will help us do that effectively.

Please share any suggestions, however small. Your feedback will help us make clearer, more accessible communications that support you in staying informed and taking timely action.