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Unused Medicines Return and Disposal through Community Pharmacy

Dear Pharmacist,

As part of the Community Pharmacy Agreement 2025 (CPA25), a nationwide service, called MediBack, is being established for unused medicines return and disposal through Community Pharmacies.

Enabling patients to return their unused medicines to their local community pharmacy restricts access to unused medicines, thereby reducing the risk of suicide, self-harm and accidental poisoning in children. Ireland's Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2024 and the National Drug Strategy: Reducing Harm and Supporting Recovery 2017-2025 highlight this need to reduce the availability of medicines which can be used for these purposes. Correctly disposing of antimicrobials (for example antibiotics) is also a simple but vital way to protect public health, as incorrect disposal can allow these medicines to enter the environment and contribute to antimicrobial resistance. Returning unused or expired medicines to pharmacies helps reduce this risk, protects our environment, and keeps these life-saving medicines effective when needed.

This service will be provided nationwide through community pharmacy, as per the terms of the CPA25. Onboarding of community pharmacies for the MediBack service will commence from early July and a campaign to raise public awareness will follow once all pharmacies have been onboarded.

Branding

Community pharmacies are required to utilise uniform branding and nomenclature to ensure standardisation and identity of the service; approved branding, logo and usage guidelines will be made available shortly.

Service Commencement and Collection Details

To ensure cost-effective and efficient delivery of the service the first nine months will be divided into two phases:

- Phase 1:
  Two 60L bins will be provided to each pharmacy on commencement. For the first three months, collections will be offered monthly. This is to allow for initial quantities that may be returned, recognising that this service was not available in most areas up to this point.
- Phase 2:
  For the following six months, collection will be available on alternate months.

The collection cycle will be reviewed after nine months to determine the optimal schedule going forward.

The company currently contracted by the HSE for this type of waste collection is Stericycle.

(i) Provision of containers:

2 x 60 litre rigid containers will be delivered by Stericycle ahead of the public awareness campaign commencing. Thereafter, replacement containers will be provided on each collection. Additional bins can be requested by Stericycle if required.

If additional containers are required between collections, pharmacies can request these by contacting serviceireland@stericycle.com, quoting the '**HSE Returned Medicines'** account. Pharmacy businesses with multiple pharmacy outlets ("chains") can nominate a central Head Office contact to liaise directly with Stericycle regarding all outlets as required.

(ii) Collection schedules:

Stericycle will liaise directly with pharmacies in relation to their collection schedule. Pharmacies must ensure that containers are closed and sealed correctly prior to collection. Collections dates will be indicated as 'Week beginning', the exact date will not be provided in advance to allow for flexibility and agility in scheduling. If a collection is not required during a scheduled cycle, the pharmacy should contact Stericycle to advise accordingly.

Enquiries regarding collection schedules can be emailed to Stericycle at serviceireland@stericycle.com using "**HSE Returned Medicines**" as the subject line. Alternatively, you can contact Stericycle by phone on **1800 937 628**.

(iii) Documentation:

As part of the operation and governance arrangements for the MediBack service, the HSE will retain documentation of the waste management company's facility authorisation licence and waste collection permit. Pharmacies should ensure that Stericycle have a valid email address to which Certificates of Destruction can be sent. These certificates should be retained by the pharmacy, to facilitate compliance with record keeping requirements, in line with Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (PSI) Guidelines on the Disposal of Medicinal Products for a Retail Pharmacy Business.

Scope of the service

The MediBack service will cover unused, unwanted, out-of-date or left-over medication, including prescription medicines, over the counter (OTC) medicines, general sales list medicines including paracetamol, throat lozenges, etc, certain veterinary medicines (i.e. only those for small companion animals / pets like cats and dogs), as well as cytotoxic and cytostatic medications, and controlled drugs having been first made unidentifiable and unusable by the pharmacy, with appropriate witnessing and recording, in line with PSI Guidelines. A detailed list of items which can be accepted is outlined in **Appendix 1**.

The MediBack service does not include items such as outer cardboard and paper packaging, sharps, veterinary medicines for large animals (eg farm animals), non-medication chemicals or clinical waste.

A list of items which cannot be accepted is provided in **Appendix 2**.

Information on using the bins is provided in **Appendix 3.**

Further information on safe disposal of different types of waste is available on www.mywaste.ie

Resources

Leaflets and posters will be available to order from www.healthpromotion.ie, and digital assets will also be available there for download.

Service Evaluation

The primary goal of MediBack is the promotion of the safe disposal of unused and expired medicines through community pharmacies. The campaign's inclusion in the CPA25 reflects its importance in supporting both patient safety and environmental responsibility.

As part of our commitment to evaluating the effectiveness of the MediBack campaign, the HSE will seek approximately 200 pharmacies to undertake a comprehensive assessment in two ways:

1. Firstly, participating pharmacies will catalogue medicines that are returned, providing valuable data on the types and quantities of pharmaceuticals being disposed of.
2. Secondly, pharmacies will facilitate patient engagement activities to gather insights into patient awareness and behaviours regarding medicine disposal.

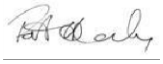
Data is to be collected over a two-month period, biannually.

To recognise the additional workload and expertise required from these pharmacies, the HSE will provide a support payment in form of an annual grant of €1800. This will support their ongoing efforts and ensure the integrity and success of the campaign's evaluation process.

A further communication will issue in due course to advise how pharmacies can come forward to participate in this evaluation.

Many thanks for your support in this important initiative to promote safe medicines management and environmental protection.

Yours Sincerely,



Pat Healy

National Director
National Services & Schemes

Appendix 1 – Classes and forms of medicines *accepted* from patients/public by the MediBack service

- ✓ Prescription medicines
- ✓ Over the counter (OTC) medicines
- ✓ General sales list medicines (i.e. medicines which can be purchased at general retailers or service stations) This includes paracetamol, throat lozenges, etc.
- ✓ Tablets or capsules in their aluminium foil strip or card, or in a receptacle eg bag, vial or jar
- ✓ Medicated drops, ointments or sprays
- ✓ Liquid medications, provided they are in their original bottle (glass or plastic), top closed
- ✓ Intact ampoules containing liquid medication
- ✓ Injector devices, e.g. pens, containing liquid medication with needles removed/retracted
- ✓ Inhalers (All types)
- ✓ Patches (e.g., Nicotine Replacement Therapy, HRT)
- ✓ Controlled drugs – having first been made unusable and unidentifiable by the pharmacy, with appropriate witnessing and recording, in line with PSI Guidelines
- ✓ Oral or topical cytotoxic or cytostatic medicines
- ✓ Hazardous medicinal products under EU Regulations
- ✓ Veterinary medicines for small companion animals / pets

Appendix 2 – Items which are *not accepted* from patients/public by the MediBack Service

- Sharps
- Outer cardboard and paper packaging
- Loose tablets or capsules which are not in a primary receptacle eg bag, vial or jar, original foil/pack/strip
- Harmless liquids, creams or ointments e.g. glucose, sodium chloride
- Flammable liquids
- Non-medication chemicals
- Clinical waste
- Vapes
- Nitrous oxide “laughing gas” canisters
- Medical devices e.g. catheters, ostomy bags
- Veterinary medicines for animals other than small companion animals (i.e. no medication for farm animals is permitted to be returned via this service, no sheep dips etc)
- Liquid medication greater than 1 litre per bottle or solids greater than 500g per primary receptacle

Further information for the public on safe disposal of different types of waste is available on the following websites:

- www.mywaste.ie
- https://www.weeeireland.ie
- https://www.hse.ie
- https://www.hsa.ie/

Further information for the public on management and disposal of veterinary medicines is available at:

https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-agriculture-food-and-the-marine/publications/veterinary-medicines-storage-record-keeping-disposal/

Arrangements for sharps disposal vary between regions, and may be managed by GPs, local health centres, primary care centres or hospital clinics. Patients enquiring about disposal of sharps should be directed in line with the arrangements in your region. Sharps should always be in the correct and properly closed sharps bin.

Appendix 3: Using the Bin(s)

MediBack - Unused Medicines Disposal Service

Guidelines for Community Pharmacists and their Teams

Preparing & Storing the Bin(s)



- Community Pharmacies will be supplied with 60L rigid bins with grey or yellow bases and purple lids by Stericycle
- All bins will be supplied as standard:
  - Pre-Labelled with a "Limited Quantities" label
  - Pre-lined with absorbent materials
- Bins should be stored in a secure, designated area, accessible to only authorised staff

Using the Bin(s)

ACCEPTED

- ✓ Prescription, Over-the-Counter, and General Sales List Medicines
- ✓ Tablets or Capsules in any packaging (paper, plastic, foil)
- ✓ Medicated drops, ointments or sprays
- ✓ Liquid medications in their original bottle with top closed
- ✓ Intact ampoules containing liquid medication
- ✓ Injector devices with needles removed / retracted
- ✓ Inhalers (All types)
- ✓ Patches (e.g. NRT)
- ✓ Controlled drugs (after denaturing in line with PSI guidelines)
- ✓ Oral or Topical Cytotoxic or Cytostatic Medicines
- ✓ Hazardous Medicinal Products under EU Regulations
- ✓ Veterinary Medicines for Small Companion Animals

NOT ACCEPTED

- × Sharps
- × Outer cardboard and paper packaging
- × Loose tablets / capsules
- × Harmless liquids, creams or ointments
- × Flammable liquids
- × Non-Medication Chemicals
- × Clinical Waste
- × Vapes
- × Nitrous Oxide Canisters
- × Medical Devices
- × Veterinary Medicines for Larger Animals

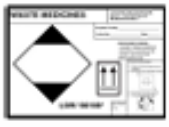
OTHER FACTORS

- All returned medications must be without infection risk
- **Returned Liquid Medication:**
  - Volume per bottle not to exceed **1L**
  - Liquids of volume > 120ml must be positioned upright (unless leak-proof in all orientations)
- **Returned Solid Medication:**
  - Weight per receptacle not to exceed **500g**
- **Bin Gross Maximum Weight:** 25kg

Closing the Bin



- Close the bin securely using the purple lid when full
- Complete the Limited Quantities Label, specifically:
  - Pharmacy name
  - Locked-by details
  - Date of closure



Collection & Replacement of Bins

Stericycle

- Stericycle will deliver bins, arrange scheduled collection and replace bins upon collection
- Additional bins can be requested from Stericycle, if required.
- Enquiries regarding bin delivery, replacement or collection can be sent to Stericycle at serviceireland@stericycle.com using "**HSE Returned Medicines**" as the subject or by calling 1800 937 628.

HSE

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