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| Advice for prescribers during the COVID-19 pandemic |
| Updated March 2021 |

Public health emergency orders have been issued to facilitate the prescribing and supply of prescription medicines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**PHEO #4 - Public health emergency order (**[**Gazette No. S 133 Tuesday 23 March 2021, Pages 2-3**](http://www.gazette.vic.gov.au/gazette/Gazettes2021/GG2021S133.pd%20Gazette%20No.%20S%20133%20Tuesday%20%20f)**) for supply on a digital image of an original paper prescription transmitted by the prescriber until midnight 27 September 2021, unless earlier revoked**

A pharmacist can supply a Schedule 4 medicine (excluding drugs of dependence) on a digital image of an original paper prescription transmitted by the prescriber. The digital image of the paper prescription must be an unaltered photo image or unaltered facsimile image of an original prescription. Forms of transmission of the digital image from the prescriber to the pharmacist may include email, SMS, facsimile or other means of electronic transmission.

The digital image of the original prescription must be transmitted directly from the prescriber (or an employee acting in accordance with the instruction of the practitioner) but not via the patient or any other intermediary.

The prescriber must: (a) sign the original paper copy of the prescription; (b) retain the original prescription in a safe and secure way for 2 years; (c) record in patient notes that a digital image of the original paper prescription was transmitted under this public health emergency order (PHEO #4); (c) produce the original paper prescription if requested by an authorised officer.

***Amendment 11 May 2020*** *– The original prescription must include the handwritten signature of the prescriber except where it is not possible for the prescription to include the handwritten signature due to operation of telehealth, the prescriber may include a digital image of their handwritten signature or give access to the digital image of their handwritten signature to an employee, where the employee acts in accordance with the instruction of the prescriber to apply the digital image of the prescriber’s signature to the original prescription.*

*Extended 10 September 2020 - This Order has been extended from 27 September 2020 until 27 March 2021, unless earlier revoked.*

*Extended 23 March 2021 - This Order has been extended from 27 March 2021 until 27 September 2021, unless earlier revoked. The Order was also amended to clarify that a repeat authorisation may be dispensed from the same pharmacy which received the digital image of the original prescription in accordance with the public health emergency order, including if this order is no longer in force.*

**DO** ask the patient which pharmacy they would like the digital image of the original prescription to be transmitted to.

**DO** ask the pharmacy how they would like to receive the digital image of the original prescription, i.e. fax, email, SMS, or alternative electronic transmission.

**DO NOT** send the original paper prescription to the pharmacy.

**DO NOT** send the digital image of the original paper prescription to the patient.

Schedule 4 drugs of dependence and Schedule 8 medicines may NOT be prescribed and supplied under this public health emergency order. Drugs of dependence include all opioids, benzodiazepines and anabolic steroids.

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