



Pharmacy Department Unlicensed Medicines

What is this leaflet about?

In the UK most medicines are “licensed” but some are not. This leaflet explains why medicines are licensed and why some medicines do not have licenses.

You will have been given this leaflet by your doctor or pharmacist because the medicine prescribed for you is not “licensed” or is being used for a reason not covered by the license. We want to reassure you that we have thought very carefully about the best medicine for you and to answer any questions you may have.

Why are medicines “licensed”?

The makers of medicines must ask the government for a ‘Marketing Authorisation’ or ‘Product License’ if they want to sell their medicines in the UK. They show evidence to the government’s Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) that their medicine works for the illness to be treated and does not have too many side effects or risks and has been made to a high standard.

How do the makers test medicines?

To be sure that a medicine works and is safe the maker has to first try it first on a small number of people in what is called a ‘clinical trial’. Information from clinical trials is given to the MHRA when the maker asks for a ‘Product License’.

Why don’t all medicines have a license?

There are several reasons why some medicines are used for illnesses or conditions not covered by their original license. Also, some medicines do not have a licence at all.

Sometimes the clinical trial (and Product Licence) is for one illness, but doctors find that the medicines works very well for another illness. These doctors use medicines for reasons that are not written in the Product Licence.

Some medicines have no licence at all. These may be medicines used for rare illnesses in which case it may be too expensive to have a clinical trial.

How do I know that these medicines are safe and will work?

This medicine may have been recommended by another doctor who is an expert, or your own doctor may have read information and research that says it is the best one for you. The Pharmacy Department will ensure that the medicine has been manufactured to a good standard and is of an acceptable quality.

How will I know that my medicine is not licensed?

Your doctor should tell you.

Unlicensed medicines may be made specifically or may be more difficult to obtain. Your pharmacist may tell you this and make special arrangements for you to get your medicines.

Should I be worried about taking these medicines?

If you are still worried after reading this leaflet, please talk to your doctors or pharmacist. They are looking after you and have thought carefully about the best medicine for you.

What if I don't want to take unlicensed medicines?

Talk it over with your doctor and tell them what you are worried about. They can tell you more about the information or advice they have about the medicine. They can also tell you about other treatments available and why they think this is the best one.

Can I get more information about my unlicensed medicine?

Your pharmacist may have a special information leaflet about your medicine or illness. Please ask. Often there are support groups for people with a particular illness or condition. Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist for information.

If I am confused what should I do?

Talk to the person who gave you this leaflet (usually your doctor or pharmacist). Ask them to explain.

Further information may be obtained from:

1. Pharmacy Department, Dorset County Hospital Foundation Trust, Dorchester
Tel 01305 25529
2. Your Original Prescriber, GP or local pharmacy
3. NHS 111 Service

How to obtain a further supply of an unlicensed medicine

If you require a further supply of an unlicensed medicine, please go back to your original prescriber to obtain a prescription. You will probably need to give the pharmacist one to two weeks to obtain the supply for you, so it is important that you do not let your supply run out before going to see your original prescriber.

About this leaflet:

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If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email pals@dchft.nhs.uk



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