



Victorian Pharmaceutical Reserve

Summary

Purpose

Victoria's pharmaceutical reserve: securing supply of essential medicines

Victoria is committed to working with health services to safeguard patient care during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In April the department convened a Pharmaceutical Reference Group to provide strategic coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance on maintaining supply of essential medicines that have been affected by global supply chain issues. The Reference Group supported the creation of a pharmaceutical reserve as a targeted initiative to reduce the risk of health services experiencing medicine shortages during the pandemic.

The reserve comprises approximately 80 pharmaceutical products including:

- Antibiotics
- Sedatives
- Analgesics
- Neuromuscular blockers
- Anti-nausea medicines
- Antipsychotics
- Bronchodilators
- Antispasmodics
- IV fluids
- Dialysis fluids.

The items were selected based on their role in treating critically ill coronavirus (COVID-19) patients, however in the event of a shortage the medicines may be available to any public hospital patient who needs them. The full list of **pharmaceutical products and other critical care items** is attached. As well as reducing the risk of shortages, the reserve will minimise the need for individual health services to build reserves, allow more equitable distribution of stock at times of scarcity and inform decisions about appropriate elective surgery rates.

The department has worked closely with the Pharmaceutical Reference Group to develop mechanisms to ensure reserve stock can be rapidly accessed by health services in the event of a shortage. The stock has already been purchased in bulk by the Department of Health and Human Services (the department) on behalf of health services and is currently stored with wholesalers (Symbion, CH2, Central Healthcare Services and Baxter Healthcare). Health services should continue to order through their usual suppliers and distributors. However, if health services experience a medicine shortage that has potential to adversely impact patient care they can order reserve stock directly from the wholesaler at no cost, and without requiring prior approval from the department. Orders will be delivered from the wholesaler within normal delivery timeframes.

Health services should only order from the reserve if they experience a shortage and when doing so should maintain normal ordering patterns and volumes. A self-assessment form must be submitted to the department after placing an order from the reserve. The department will review orders against current hospital activity and stock levels. This process will include targeted peer-review of orders by Directors of Pharmacy and the Pharmaceutical Reference Group. Stock levels in the reserve will be actively monitored.

Before a health service orders from the reserve the following conditions should be met:

- No stock of the item available from preferred or non-preferred wholesaler (backorder notification received).
- Insufficient stock available across all areas of the hospital to cover predicted demand until normal supply resumes.
- Item should be available in the reserve (if not, follow normal process for when an item is out of stock).
- Submit a pharmaceutical reserve self-assessment form to the department by close of the next business day after an order is placed.
- Quantity ordered should not be greater than normal ordering pattern. If the quantity ordered is greater than normal, a reason must be provided on the self-assessment form.

Victoria's pharmaceutical reserve is one component of Victoria's response to maintaining medicine access during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The reserve does not include every medicine but focuses on those for treating critically ill coronavirus (COVID-19) patients. The department is also working with the Reference Group on other strategies to safeguard medicine supply, including modelling demand, developing guidelines for clinically appropriate substitutes and improving inventory management at health services. Victoria continues to work closely with the Therapeutic Goods Administration and other jurisdictions on medicine shortages, ensuring a coordinated approach to maintaining access to all medicines during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.