

# Three month limit for three HRT products to ensure continued access

- Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) issued to limit dispensing to 3 months' supply of Oestrogel®, Ovestin® cream and Premique Low Dose® to ensure women across the UK will be able to more reliably access Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) products
- Women will only pay for prescriptions if they are dispensed in full meaning they will not face additional costs
- Move follows appointment of Madelaine McTernan as Head of the HRT Supply Taskforce and will enable more women to access the HRT they need

Urgent action is being taken to ensure women across the UK will be able to more reliably access HRT products, as the Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid issues Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) to limit the dispensing of 3 HRT products to 3 months' supply.

In response to concerns regarding longer prescribing cycles putting pressure on availability of some HRT products, the government has made the decision to issue SSPs to three products in high demand to ensure women are able to access the HRT they need.

Women who have a prescription for more than three months but are only able to access three months' supply will not have to pay an additional prescription charge. This means women will not incur any additional costs. Imposing a three month limit will mean more women are able to access the medication they want. Any woman who is worried about access to HRT or is unable to access HRT should speak to her GP.

This follows the recent appointment of Vaccine Taskforce Director General Madelaine McTernan to spearhead a new HRT Supply Taskforce, applying lessons learned from the successful procurement seen during the Covid vaccination programme to identify ways to support the HRT supply chain ensuring it can meet both short and long term demand. The move will save time for patients as well as pharmacists and prescribers who are working tirelessly to tackle the covid backlog.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

I want to reassure women I have listened to their concerns and will not hesitate to take decisive action to ensure they can access the HRT they need.

We will leave no stone unturned in our national mission to boost supply of HRT – and this next step will ensure women across the UK will be able to reliably access this vital medication and maintain this lifeline for millions who need it.

Demand for HRT has dramatically risen with a 38% increase in the number of prescription items over the last seven years as there is greater awareness around the menopause and GPs are more confident in prescribing. Supplies of the vast majority of HRT products, including alternatives to those affected, currently remain available

The SSPs, which are set to expire on Friday 29 July 2022, allow community pharmacists to supply the three specified HRT products according to the protocol rather than the written prescription, without needing to seek authorisation from the prescriber. This will even out distribution of in demand for products such as Oestrogels which have recently experienced issues due to rising demand. Pharmacists are expected to use their professional judgement when deciding to apply the SSP and patients must be consulted.

Head of the HRT Supply Taskforce Madeline McTernan said:

This is a step in the right direction of tackling the supply issues women are facing when it comes to accessing HRT and ensuring ongoing, reliable supply.

Minister for Women's Health Maria Caulfield said:

HRT can be a lifeline for women suffering from severe menopause symptoms including anxiety, difficulty sleeping, night sweats and hot flushes.

We will do everything in our power to make sure women can access the HRT they need both in the short and long term as part of our drive to improve the quality of life for menopausal women.

We are taking action to increase access and reduce the cost of HRT meaning women can pay a one-off charge equivalent to two single prescription charges, currently £18.70, for all their HRT prescriptions for a year.

This prepayment certificate will mean women can access HRT on a month by month basis if need be, easing pressure on supply, while keeping the cost of HRT low. This system will be implemented from April 2023.

This forms part of the wider government agenda to reduce the gender health gap and increase support for menopausal and peri-menopausal women. In the recent call for evidence to inform the upcoming Women's Health Strategy, menopause was the third most selected topic that respondents picked for inclusion in the plan, with 48% of respondents selecting this as a priority. This is in line with the governments commitment to tackle health disparities and support everyone to live healthier, happier lives.

As set out in our women's health vision document, the menopause will be a key priority in the first government-led Women's Health Strategy for England. The UK wide Menopause Taskforce will also consider the role of education and

training, workplace policies and peer groups for menopausal women can play in supporting women through what can be a mentally and physically challenging time.

## **Background**

- The SSPs applies across the whole of the UK.
- The SSPs applies to the following products:
- Oestrogel pump-pack 750mcg/actuation gel
- Ovestin 1mg cream
- Premique low dose 0.3mg/1.5mg modified release tablets
- The SSPs do not authorise pharmacists to dispense alternative products.