



COMMUNITY PHARMACY BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

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Since **31 July 2023**, NHS community pharmacy contractors in England have been required to have an **up-to-date business continuity plan (BCP) for each pharmacy premises**, available at those premises at all times.

The plan must address temporary suspension of pharmaceutical services due to illness or another reason beyond the contractor's control. Contractors must use all reasonable endeavours to implement it when a suspension occurs, or becomes likely, with action proportionate to that likelihood.

1. Check that your plan includes the required arrangements

Your BCP must include arrangements for:

- **Notifying the commissioner:** reporting a likely or actual temporary suspension through the approved process, including its anticipated duration.
- **Updating the NHS Directory of Services (DoS):** reflecting the suspension and subsequent resumption of services.
- **Reducing urgent care referrals:** taking practicable steps to prevent patients being referred to the pharmacy for affected urgent care services.
- **Informing local providers:** notifying the main local GP practices and other local pharmacy contractors of the closure and its anticipated duration, where practicable and reasonable.
- **Informing patients:** displaying the required closure information where it can be seen from outside the pharmacy. Distance-selling pharmacies must provide the relevant information on their website.
- **Supporting continuity of care:** setting out arrangements, where practicable, for affected patients, including those with booked appointments or regular supervised administration of medicines.

The arrangements must be proportionate to the needs of the people who use your pharmacy.

2. Make the plan practical for your team

- **Responsibilities:** name the person who will coordinate the response and a deputy.
- **Contact details:** check staff, locum agencies, the pharmacy owner or superintendent, commissioner, LPC, nearby pharmacies, GP practices, IT support and utility providers.

- **Access:** keep a paper copy and a securely accessible backup so an IT failure or loss of access to the premises does not prevent its use.
- **Disruption scenarios:** include actions for pharmacist absence, staff shortages, power or water failure, IT/EPS outages, fire, flooding, severe weather and loss of premises.
- **Patient priorities:** identify how urgent prescriptions, outstanding deliveries, care home supplies, supervised medicines and booked consultations will be managed.
- **Medicines and records:** include procedures for securing stock, controlled drugs and confidential information, and managing refrigerator temperature excursions.

For each step, specify who takes action, what they do, and who they contact.

3. Act when disruption occurs or closure becomes likely

Use the following sequence alongside your pharmacy's procedures:

1. **Assess safety and service impact.** Establish which services can continue safely and lawfully.
2. **Activate the BCP.** Involve the pharmacy owner or superintendent and seek practical solutions, such as replacement pharmacist cover.
3. **Notify the commissioner.** Report a suspension as soon as practicable and, wherever possible, before it starts. Use the approved notification route; NHS England's approved particulars specify MYS wherever possible.
4. **Manage referrals and communications.** Update the DoS, take steps to reduce affected urgent referrals, inform relevant local providers and display the required patient notice.
5. **Prioritise affected patients.** Contact those at greatest risk of interruption to treatment and support appropriate alternative arrangements. Follow EPS procedures where prescriptions need to be made available elsewhere.
6. **Record your response.** Keep an incident log of decisions, actions, notifications and any limitations that prevented parts of the plan being implemented.

Actions should reflect the duration of the disruption, patient needs, and what is reasonably practicable. Contractors must use all reasonable endeavours to maintain services and avoid a likely suspension or resume services as soon as practicable following closure.

4. Restore services and review what happened

Before reopening, check staffing, premises, systems and medicines are suitable for safe service delivery. Update service availability and inform relevant providers and patients.

As good practice, review the incident with the team, address outstanding prescriptions and appointments, and amend the BCP where lessons have been identified.

5. Keep the plan up to date

Set a regular review date and update the plan whenever staffing, contact details, systems, services or local arrangements change. An annual review and a short practice exercise are recommended ways to check that it remains usable.

Make sure permanent staff, relief staff and locums know where the plan is kept and understand their responsibilities.

Your pharmacy's quick checklist

- ☐ A current, premises-specific BCP is available.
- ☐ All required temporary suspension arrangements are included.
- ☐ Contact details and notification routes have been checked.
- ☐ Staff and locums know how to activate the plan.
- ☐ Patients needing continuity of care have been considered.
- ☐ The plan remains accessible during an IT outage.
- ☐ A review date and responsible person are recorded.

Templates and support

Community Pharmacy England provides a [temporary closure guidance page, BCP template, action checklist and closure notices](#).

For help reviewing or developing your plan, contact CPCW at support@cpcw.org.uk.

Your BCP should be a working document that the team can put into action immediately.