

Notice: Ontario Drug Benefit Program and Exceptional Access Program Changes during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

April 15, 2020

On March 20, 2020, the Ministry of Health announced several Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program changes and guidance for dispensers during the COVID-19 public health emergency. The Executive Officer Notice is available at the following link:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/drugs/opdp_eo/notices/exec_office_20200320.pdf

To ensure the safety of Ontarians, pharmacists and ministry employees, the ministry is announcing additional changes that are effective immediately:

Exceptional Access Program Operations

The Exceptional Access Program (EAP) has instituted contingency operations to support public health efforts to promote social distancing and limit unnecessary travel during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Our staff remain committed to helping ODB recipients continue to have uninterrupted access to EAP drug products and to important therapies that require case-by-case review. Some of our services have been modified to support “virtual” work efforts.

The Telephone Request Service (TRS) will not be operating until further notice. Prescribers and their delegates should fax TRS requests through an expedited fax line set up to receive these requests. Please use the fax number **1-844-227-6590** to submit **TRS requests only**. This includes requests for TRS cancer drugs and regular TRS drugs. Hospitals may continue to use the **hospital discharge fax line** for ODB recipients imminently awaiting discharge and who require an EAP drug product.

For information about approximate turnaround time for processing requests, please see the weekly updates found at the following link:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/drugs/eap_mn.aspx.

Please use EAPFeedback.MOH@ontario.ca for specific questions.

All requests for EAP approvals are being prioritized to meet the needs of ODB recipients. Less urgent requests may be delayed during this time. All EAP requests can be submitted electronically through the **Special Authorization Digital Information Exchange (SADIE)** portal. Prescribers can access SADIE by visiting: ontario.ca/sadie. Information for prescribers about logging into SADIE can be found on our website at:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/sadie/training/getting_access.aspx

Limited Use Authorization Period Extensions

The ministry is encouraging pharmacists to use their professional judgement to extend an expiring LU authorization period if appropriate for prescriptions where the prescriber is unable to confirm that the ODB eligible patient continues to meet the criteria due to the following:

- The recipient is unable to visit their prescriber as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to verify continued eligibility under an appropriate LU criterion; or
- The pharmacy is unable to contact the prescriber during the COVID-19 pandemic to verify continued eligibility under an appropriate LU criterion.

The LU authorization period can only be extended when all the following conditions are met:

- The patient has previously met the clinical conditions for a limited use (LU) drug product listed on the ODB Formulary; and
- The drug is one for which ongoing therapy is appropriate and the prescriber would be likely to extend the LU authorization period if contacted (i.e., the LU criteria do not direct a finite treatment period, with no allowable extensions); and
- The extension is for the same duration as the original LU authorization period (if the LU criteria do not direct a finite treatment period).

The extension of the LU authorization does not allow for the extension of quantities, durations, doses or refills that are otherwise restricted by drug-specific LU criteria.

Pharmacists must ensure that the following is noted on the prescription dispensing record:

- Appropriate reason for use (RFU) code; and
- Date and duration of LU authorization period extension; and
- The reason the LU authorization period was extended; and
- The name and college registration number (license number) of the pharmacist who extended the LU authorization period.

A valid prescription authorizing the dispensed quantity must still be kept on file. Copies of prescriptions with LU documentation must be retained by the pharmacy for 24 months as required by section 29 of O. Reg. 201/96 made under the *Ontario Drug Benefit Act*.

Blood Glucose Test Strip (BGTS) Requests

Pharmacists have the ability to bill for a maximum of 100 additional test strips for non-insulin dependent ODB recipients who have been directed by a healthcare professional, for clinical reasons, to monitor blood glucose levels more closely than what would be required

over a one-year period as determined by their anti-diabetic medication profile. Pharmacists can enter the intervention code **MG – Override – Clinical Reasons** for ODB recipients with documented clinical reasons for requiring test strips beyond the prescribed annual limit for a given 365-day period and submit a claim of up to 100 test strips. Documentation must include the reason for the higher than recommended monitoring schedule, *specific* testing frequency (if not indicated on the prescription) and the name of the referring healthcare professional.

If there is a clinical circumstance in which an ODB recipient requires additional test strips (above the additional 100), a request can be faxed to **1-888-444-0116** with the following details:

- A signed letter/prescription from the ODB recipient’s authorized prescriber (Ontario physician or nurse practitioner) indicating:
 - The ODB recipient’s exceptional clinical circumstances that require additional blood glucose testing
 - The number of times per day the ODB recipient is required to do blood glucose testing based on the exceptional clinical circumstances.
 - The length of time this higher than usual monitoring is going to occur.
 - **Note:** The pharmacy may obtain verbal confirmation from the authorized prescriber, provided that the verbal confirmation is documented by the pharmacy in writing.

- In addition, the fax must also include:
 - Full name of the ODB recipient including Ontario Health card # and date of birth.
 - A list of medications (if any) the ODB recipient currently receives for diabetes.
 - The ODB recipient’s current allotment of BGTS within a 365-day period based on the Ministry’s current BGTS reimbursement policy.
 - Contact name, phone #, and fax # of the pharmacy.

Nutrition Product Form Extensions

Nutrition product forms are valid for one year following the date completed. For nutrition product forms that are expiring during the COVID-19 pandemic period, the ministry is allowing pharmacists to extend the authorization period of the form for another 6 months if the prescriber cannot be reached for completion of a new form. The pharmacist must ensure that they document the reason for the extension on the original valid and complete form. Pharmacists are reminded that the nutrition product form supporting an ODB eligible nutrition product claim must be kept on file for two years from the day the nutrition product claim was submitted.

An extension of the one-year authorization period for a nutrition product form does not allow an extension of quantities, durations, doses or refills. A valid prescription for the dispensed quantity must still be kept on file. An extension of the nutrition product form authorization period should not be confused with a prescription renewal. Note that new patients or patients switching to another nutrition product will require a nutrition product form to be completed by the prescriber in order for the nutrition product to be eligible for coverage under the ODB program.

Waiver of 3-Month Waiting Period for OHIP Eligibility

Effective March 19, 2020, and as a direct result of COVID-19, the Government of Ontario has temporarily removed the 3-month waiting period normally required for new Ontarians to be able to receive benefits under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP).

As OHIP eligibility is one of the requirements for Ontarians to access benefits under the ODB program for most of the ODB eligibility streams, the ministry is advising pharmacists of the following issues that may prevent them from dispensing eligible prescriptions and temporary measures to facilitate this change.

Issue

The ministry is working to process the backlog of OHIP applications in queue which is estimated to take approximately 2 weeks.

Pharmacists are requested to take the following temporary measures to bypass the **C8** response code (i.e., no record of beneficiary) until the backlog is processed:

For **Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)** and **Ontario Works (OW)** recipients the pharmacist should confirm their eligibility through the SAV portal.

For **long-term care (LTC) home residents, Home Care (HC) recipients, Homes for Special Care (HSC)/Community Homes for Opportunity (CHO) residents and children and youth 24 years of age and under with no private plan (OHIP+)**:

Step 1. The recipient must call Service Ontario (SO) who will enter the recipient's information into the system immediately and provide the recipient with their Ontario Health card number and version code. This is for urgent circumstances only.

Step 2. Once the recipient's OHIP coverage has been confirmed, and pharmacists have verified patient ODB coverage, pharmacists may use the ML HNS intervention code and the correct carrier ID to establish ODB eligibility. In cases, where enrollment by SO cannot be established immediately, patients should be advised to return the next day as OHIP coverage should be established overnight.

For **Seniors and Trillium Drug Program (TDP)** recipients, the HNS intervention code cannot be utilized. Pharmacists are advised to inform recipients to contact SO to expedite the upload of their OHIP coverage in the HNS and return the next day as OHIP coverage should be established overnight. For clarity, anyone looking to obtain ODB benefits through the TDP must submit an application to the ministry at:

Fax: (416) 642-3034; or
E-mail: trillium@ontariodrugbenefit.ca

Alternatively, recipients may pay out-of-pocket and submit a copy of the receipt via email or fax, ensuring that their Ontario Health card number and/or TDP eligibility number is noted:

Fax: (416) 642-3034; or
Email: trillium@ontariodrugbenefit.ca

Please note, reimbursement applies to ODB-eligible products only.

Prescription Forgery Notifications

If a pharmacist suspects a prescription is a forgery, they are to notify the prescriber. During the pandemic period, until otherwise notified, please ask the prescriber to notify the ministry's Drug Programs Delivery Branch via email at DrugProgramsDelivery@ontario.ca, instead of by fax, with the following details:

- A letter on their clinic or hospital letterhead which shows the reporting physician's / pharmacist's full information (name, address, phone/fax numbers, etc.).
- The areas / cities where the forgeries have been identified (if known).
- The name(s) of the drug(s) mentioned on the forgeries (if known).
- Attach any forged prescription pages they may have.
- Details about how the prescriber/pharmacist would like the pharmacists to handle the situation (e.g. not dispense, call the clinic directly).
- Any other important information that should be included on the notice.

Submitting Paper Claims

Pharmacies are reminded that to submit a paper drug benefit claim or drug benefit claim reversal, pharmacies must complete a Drug Benefit Claim/Reversal form and send it to:

Ministry of Health
Claims Services Branch
130 Dufferin Avenue 4th Floor
London ON N6A 5R2

The ministry has taken measures to ensure the processing of paper claims that are **sent to the London office**; sending paper claims to any other location may result in payment delays. Please note that dispensers are now able to submit claim reversals for processing electronically, up to 90 days after the original dispensing date.

Additional Information:

For pharmacies:

Please call ODB Pharmacy Help Desk at: 1-800-668-6641

For all other Health Care Providers and the Public:

Please call ServiceOntario, Infoline at 1-866-532-3161 TTY 1-800-387-5559. In Toronto, TTY 416-327-4282.