

Best practice guidance on the sale of medicines for pain relief

- Don't sell more than two packs in any one transaction
- Don't use offers that encourage the sale of more than one pack

What is best practice?

Sales:

Restrict sales of medicines for pain relief to a maximum of two packs in any one transaction. This means any **solid dose** (oral tablet or capsule) medicines for pain relief (containing paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin) without pharmacist supervision.

Low dose aspirin 75 mg tablets are not indicated for pain. However, it is recommended that best practice is followed for all aspirin products to minimise excess purchases.

Explanation:

Many deaths occur each year from overdose with paracetamol from liver failure. Individuals who overdose with ibuprofen or aspirin can experience serious physical harm, including bleeding in the gut and kidney failure.

This limit is a reasonable balance between meeting a customer's immediate need for pain relief while helping to minimise stockpiling and accidental or impulsive overdose.

Tools that can be used to implement this best practice include:

- Bars at checkouts to prevent purchase of more than two packs.
- Regular training for staff on the restrictions, either in person or on-line, the reason for them, and how to respond to customers who want to buy larger quantities.
- Notices for customers and for staff to raise awareness and include signposts to support charities such as the [Samaritans](#) or [Papyrus](#) aimed for young people.
- Remove supply of packs in bargain bins, or displays by checkouts as this encourages impulse purchasing.
- Wholesalers use of membership cards to permit multiple sales to registered retailers (Trade) and limit sales to individuals accessing cash & carry stores.

Offers:

Promotional offers on medicines for pain relief should not directly encourage the purchase of more than one pack. For example:

- 'buy one get one free' or
- 'buy one and get x at a reduced price'

Promotions on loyalty card points (above the normal points available) on any purchase are discouraged on the grounds of public safety.

Price promotions are also discouraged on the grounds of public safety.

Consider whether gifts with purchases are appropriate and ensure they are not overtly promotional.

Explanation:

Promotional offers may encourage consumers to purchase more packs than they currently need. The customer may stockpile excess packs, which pose a danger for accidental or impulsive overdose.

Security

Pain medicines are popular items for shoplifting; therefore retailers should remain vigilant.

On-line sales:

Restrict sales in line with best practice and the law.

Multiple purchases to a single address may be prevented with timed purchasing controls, preventing repeat purchases per day.

Avoid delivery of pain relief medicines directly to patients in healthcare settings to avoid medication errors.

Why are these restrictions needed?

Medicines for pain relief on general sale are effective and acceptably safe when used according to the label instructions. But there is evidence to show that people sometimes use large quantities of these medicines sometimes as a result of short-term crisis or on impulse.

Restricting the availability of pain relief medicines for purchase and in the home is effective in reducing the number of hospital admissions and deaths from accidental or impulsive overdose.

What does the law say?

The maximum pack size for pain relief medicines in a general sale outlet is 16 tablets or capsules. A pharmacy may sell larger packs containing up to 32 tablets or capsules under the supervision of a pharmacist. It is illegal for either general sales outlets or pharmacies to sell more than 100 tablets or capsules of either paracetamol or aspirin in any one transaction without prescription.

Where can I get further advice and information?

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has developed this guidance with stakeholders representing large and small retailers, pharmacists, trading standards offices and the pharmaceutical industry. Additional restrictions apply to certain products available only from pharmacies.

Further advice on these voluntary restrictions is available from your trade association, local trading standards office or from MHRA Customer Services at

MHRACustomerServices@mhra.gov.uk