

Dear Cllr Davis,

Thank you for your correspondence of 7 October to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about medicine supply issues. I have been asked to reply.

I was sorry to read of the difficulties the residents of Oldham have been facing whilst trying to source their vital medications.

The Department appreciates how frustrating and distressing this can be for patients and it is working closely with industry, the NHS, manufacturers and other partners in the supply chain to resolve issues as quickly as possible to make sure patients can access the medicines they need.

Medicine supply chains are complex, global and highly regulated and there are a number of reasons why supply can be disrupted, many of which are not specific to the UK and outside of Government control. This includes manufacturing difficulties, access to raw materials, sudden demand spikes or distribution issues and regulatory issues. There are around 14,000 licensed medicines and the overwhelming majority are in good supply.

While supply issues cannot always be prevented from occurring, the Government has a range of well-established processes and tools to manage them when they arise and mitigate risks to patients.

These include close and regular engagement with suppliers, use of alternative strengths or forms of a medicine to allow patients to remain on the same product, expediting regulatory procedures, sourcing unlicensed imports from abroad, adding products to the restricted exports and hoarding list, use of Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs), and issuing NHS communications to provide management advice and information on the issue to healthcare professionals including pharmacists, so they can advise and support their patients. Further information can be found through the supply guide at

[www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/a-guide-to-the-systems-and-processes-for-managing-medicines-supply-issues-in-england/](http://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/a-guide-to-the-systems-and-processes-for-managing-medicines-supply-issues-in-england/)

I would like to reassure you that the resilience of UK supply chains is a key priority, and the Department and NHS England are committed to helping to build long term supply chain resilience for medicines. The Department is continually learning and seeking to improve the way it works to both manage and help prevent supply issues and avoid shortages.

In early August, the policy paper, *“Managing a robust and resilience supply of medicines”*, was published. This provides transparency of the supply chains that are relied on, the actions taken to protect patients from medicines shortages when they occur, and the steps that are being taken to enhance resilience in supply chains. The publication outlines a number of actions, including:

- consulting on better reporting of supply issues;
- consulting on pharmacist flexibilities to allow pharmacists to supply an alternative if they do not have the exact prescribed item available, under certain circumstances;
- publishing information guides for patients, community pharmacies and general practices about what to do when faced with supply issues; and
- providing shortage information at the point of prescribing in general practice.

The publication can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-a-robust-and-resilient-supply-of-medicines/managing-a-robust-and-resilient-supply-of-medicines>.

The Department will continue to work closely with the respective manufacturers to resolve any medicine issues as soon as possible and to ensure patients have continuous access to medicines in the UK.

Of any resident in Oldham is concerned about their treatment, they should discuss this with their clinician at the earliest opportunity.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Correspondence Officer

**Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries**

**Department of Health and Social Care**