

Avoiding hand out errors during the COVID-19 pandemic

Pharmacy teams must take action to reduce the spread of coronavirus. [This includes:](#)

- Maintaining social distancing of two metres, except when providing clinical care and wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Practising good hand and respiratory hygiene.
- Wearing appropriate PPE at all times. Type 11R face masks should be worn to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

Unless specific exemptions exist, patients and customers are also required to wear face coverings when entering shops and pharmacies.

Whilst necessary, the use of face masks and face coverings can make communication more difficult. Although this impacts everyone, it may particularly affect those with hearing impairments who may also have trouble reading lips and recognising facial expressions, particularly as the use of transparent face coverings is not widespread. This may be compounded by protective screens which can cause sounds to rebound and become distorted. This has led to concerns that handout errors may be more likely, as patients and pharmacy colleagues struggle to communicate.

This paper has been developed to support pharmacy teams as they think about how to adapt their processes to support patients throughout the pandemic.

Top Tips

- Raise awareness of the risks of handout errors among colleagues. Concerns should be discussed with staff, and included on monthly patient safety report documentation, as well as in internal communications such as newsletters or memos. Businesses should consider updating their standard operating procedures (SOPs).
- Display signs to warn patients and customers that it might be difficult to hear and remind them to ask for assistance if needed.
- Speak slower, louder, and lower when talking with a person who is having difficulty hearing.
- Before handing out medication, ask the patient or their representative to confirm the full name and address of the patient, not the other way around. This reduces the likelihood of miscommunications. Asking for confirmation of date of birth may also reduce handout errors.
- Consider asking for additional confirmation of identification to allow details to be cross checked. This could include asking patients or their representatives to:
 - Show something with the patient's address on.
 - Write down the address of the patient. This might also be helpful if individuals are reluctant to share the address in a busy pharmacy.
 - Read the bag/dispensing labels and confirm the details are correct.
- Identify patients for whom miscommunications may be more likely. This could include regular patients who need additional support or patients with the same or similar names.
- If possible, consider the configuration of the pharmacy. The layout may be contributing to issues with communication.
- Consider if technological solutions which run alongside the PMR system could be used to minimise errors.
- If in doubt, always double check the patient's name and address.

