

FACT SHEET

Prescription Expiry

A fact sheet is a plain-language explanation of the legislation that forms the foundation of certain pharmacy practices. It provides useful information and references to help pharmacy professionals understand a particular topic. A fact sheet is an informational resource and is not considered legal advice. Always refer to the legislation for full context.

Legislative References

- Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, 1996*
- [Controlled Substances Regulations](#)

Additional References

- [Code of Ethics](#)
- Fact Sheet: [Expiry Dates on Prescription Labels](#)

Definitions

Controlled substance: A substance set out in Schedules I, II, III, IV, or Part 1 of V of the federal [Controlled Drug and Substances Act](#). This resource applies to the substances named in Schedule 1 (narcotics), Schedule 2 (controlled drugs) and Schedule 3 (targeted substances) under the [Controlled Substances Regulations](#).

Prescription Drug: A drug on [Health Canada's Prescription Drug List](#) and/or in [NAPRA National Drug Schedule I](#).

Background

Pharmacists are required to determine whether it is appropriate to dispense a medication, whether a prescription is new or a refill. When an extended period of time has elapsed since a prescription was issued or last refilled, pharmacists have a professional and ethical responsibility to use their professional judgement, assess the patient, and consider the circumstances at hand to make a decision in the best interest of the patient.

Prescription Drugs

In Ontario, all prescriptions authorized by prescribers for prescription drugs remain valid, unless otherwise specified by the prescriber. While some pharmacy practice management systems may include a default pre-populated expiry date, this does not replace the pharmacist's responsibility to exercise their clinical judgment and decision-making authority.

Controlled Substances

Prescriptions for controlled substances have *additional* requirements under federal legislation. Pharmacy professionals are required to document the date they receive the prescription (and their name).

The date a prescription is received is important because a prescription for a controlled substance is considered to have a two-year expiry from that date, rather than the date it was issued by the prescriber or dispensed. This receipt date also determines the period during which a pharmacist can adapt (modify) or renew (extend) the prescription, and during which a pharmacy professional can transfer it.

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Revision History

Version #	Date	Action
1.0	June 2014	Published as “Prescription Expiry Fact Sheet”
2.0	March 2020	Added information on subsection 56 exemption from Health Canada.
2.1	October 2026	Revised to reflect <i>Controlled Substances Regulations</i> coming into effect.