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Dear colleague,

SUPPORTING OUR NHS24 AND OUT OF HOURS COLLEAGUES

Firstly, I would like to thank you and your pharmacy team for your outstanding work as we head into the winter period. Your effort throughout this year, as well as across the previous two years, to continue to provide the highest level of pharmaceutical care to your local communities in such difficult circumstances has been invaluable, and I remain extremely grateful to you all for what you do.

As you will be aware, there has been an increase in Group A Streptococcus (GAS) infections, mainly in children aged under 10 years of age, and a rise in the number of cases of rare but serious invasive Group A Streptococcus (iGAS) infection reported across the UK, although the overall prevalence remains very low. Scarlet fever is a relatively common childhood illness, which is caused by GAS. Although GAS usually causes a mild illness with symptoms such as skin infections, sore throat and fever, it can result in longer-term complications like rheumatic fever and kidney disease. For this reason, it is recommended that scarlet fever is treated with antibiotics.

This, alongside an increase in both seasonal flu and COVID-19 cases, has meant that our colleagues in NHS24 and local Out Of Hours (OOH) services have seen unprecedented levels of demand over the four-day festive period. It is anticipated that New Year is likely to be as, if not more, busy and so I am looking for your assistance in easing some of the pressures, where possible, by following the

- **Supplies of antibiotics:** ensure you have sufficient supplies of antibiotics and other essential medicines if you are covering any of the four-day public holidays, taking into account any reduced wholesaler delivery schedules. Please order antibiotic stocks sensibly to avoid more pressure on the supply chain. If you do not have any antibiotic stock rather than send an individual away, please try to locate a pharmacy locally with stock and direct them there.
- **Use of the eight shortage protocols:** review and familiarise yourself with the scope for each shortage protocol and fully utilise them if a suitable supply can be made, ensuring you notify the patient's prescriber and/or GP practice.
- **Use of the Unscheduled Care PGD:** review and familiarise yourself with the scope of the Unscheduled Care Patient Group Direction (PGD) and fully utilise it, where appropriate, to help people who have run out of repeat medicines over the public holidays rather than sending them to OOHs and/or NHS24.

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- **Professional to professional contact:** if you are in any doubt please use the professional-to-professional contact details to discuss whether a patient referral for an appointment is appropriate or a prescription is required for the patient's condition. You should be able to get this number from your local Health Board. Please don't send all individuals away to phone 111 as this is just increasing pressure on the 111 phone lines; use your professional judgement and if they can wait for routine care then please advise them accordingly.
- **Locum awareness:** please make sure any locums that you employ over the four day holiday period are familiar with the shortage protocols, have signed the Unscheduled Care PGD, have signed any of the Pharmacy First and Public Health Service PGDs and have a note of the professional-to-professional contact details.

Advice for parents

Pharmacy professionals provide advice and reassurance to worried parents and carers, as well as patients, routinely every day. Parents and guardians have been advised to be alert for symptoms of illnesses caused by GAS and to seek medical advice from their GP or out-of-hours doctor so that their child can be treated appropriately and to help prevent the infection becoming serious.

Guidance for the public is available at: [Streptococcus A \(Strep A\) | NHS inform](#).

Thank you once again for your continued efforts to provide the highest quality of pharmaceutical care, advice and support to those who need it.

Yours sincerely,



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CHIEF PHARMACEUTICAL OFFICER