



New rules for Class B and Class C controlled drugs

This guide, co-produced by the RNZCGP and the Pharmaceutical Society of New Zealand, provides an overview of the rules that apply to controlled drugs from 5 October 2023. For more detailed information, see [Manatū Hauora FAQs](#).

Class	Examples	Maximum prescription duration	Dispensing rules
Class B opioid controlled drugs	Fentanyl, methadone (not OST*), morphine, oxycodone	1 month (30 days)	Dispensed in 10 day lots as per Pharmac rules unless exception criteria are met. **
Class B <i>non-opioid</i> controlled drugs	Dexamfetamine, lisdexamfetamine, methylphenidate, Class B medicinal cannabis products	3 months (90 days)	Dispensed in monthly lots (or smaller lots more frequently if specified). No provision in the law for more than a month's supply at a time.
Class C opioid controlled drugs	Codeine, dihydrocodeine, tramadol	1 month (30 days)	Dispensed in a single lot (unless smaller lot more frequently is specified).
Class C <i>non-opioid</i> controlled drugs	Benzodiazepines including clobazam, zopiclone, ketamine, phenobarbitone, phentermine, Class C medicinal cannabis products	3 months (90 days)	Dispensed in monthly lots (or smaller lots more frequently if specified). No provision in the law for more than a month's supply at a time.

* OST = Opioid Substitution Treatment ** May be dispensed in a single lot if the patient or their representative, signs that they need to collect the full amount for reasons of limited mobility, transport, relocation or travel (Pharmac [Rule 4.4.2](#)).

Notes:

- These rules apply to both electronic prescriptions (via NZePS) and physical triplicate paper prescriptions.
- Doctors, nurse practitioners, nurse prescribers and pharmacist prescribers can all prescribe the durations listed above. The specific lists of controlled drugs that nurse prescribers and pharmacist prescribers can prescribe have not changed.
- Pharmacists can only dispense a **maximum of 1 month's supply** at a time for any controlled drugs.
- Except for barcoded NZePS prescriptions that are successfully downloaded, all other controlled drug prescriptions require a wet ink signature and the original prescription sent to the pharmacy within 2 working days.
- Paracetamol and codeine combination preparations are not affected by the rule changes.
- Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST) by an authorised OST prescriber may be prescribed up to three months.