

Medicine Matters Special Bulletin (5)

North of England
Commissioning Support

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Medicines information for care staff in care homes: Vitamin D supplements

Background In the UK most people can get sufficient vitamin D from sunlight from the end of March to the end of September therefore everyone is advised to take 10mcg (400iu) daily in the Autumn and Winter. However some frail and housebound people and those in care homes often don't get sufficient sunlight. The Department of Health and Social Care has prioritised a one-off 4 month, free supply to these people as it is likely those who have been shielding or at risk due to national restrictions didn't get outdoors as much as usual this last year. It is expected that this supply will arrive in January. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vitamin-d-for-vulnerable-groups/vitamin-d-and-care-homes-guidance>

What does this mean for care homes?

Normally care homes are responsible for meeting the full nutritional needs of their residents.

The vitamin D preparation received in care homes will be a supplement and not prescribed by the GP.

Each resident should be offered the supplement where it is safe but there are some circumstances where there is a contra-indication and care home providers will need to check it is suitable using residents' care plans and MAR charts.

If you are still unsure you should not administer until you can discuss with the resident's GP or health care professional at their next opportunity. Your community pharmacy may be able to help in some circumstances.

Do not offer vitamin D supplements to residents in these circumstances –

1. Those already prescribed medications containing vitamin D (cholecalciferol) e.g. calcium and vitamin D supplements. There are various brands of these e.g. Calcichew, Cali-D, Adcal, Evacal, Cacit D and it is likely that care homes may have a proportion of their residents taking these already as prescribed by their GP.
2. Those that have one of these medical conditions-
 - those under the care of a renal, endocrinology or cancer specialist
 - people with high vitamin D levels
 - people with [kidney stones](#) (now or in the past)
 - people with [too much parathyroid hormone](#) (hyperparathyroidism),

- people with cancer (some cancers can lead to high calcium levels)
 - people with severe kidney disease
 - people with a rare illness called [sarcooidosis](#)
3. Those with an allergy to vitamin D or its ingredients.
 4. Those with swallowing difficulties where they may already have their nutritional needs met e.g. tube fed
- Note: Carers may need to explain to residents why vitamin D is not being offered to them if they come into one of the above categories.

Capacity and consent: Carers can only administer these supplements to residents if they have informed consent or on the basis of a Best Interest (BI) decision as with a prescribed medication. This should be recorded for each resident.

Person centred care: Provision should be person centred and documented in the care plan e.g. time of day.

Strength and frequency of administration: check for any contra-indications as above and consent/BI has been recorded

- Administer 2 drops of the vitamin D liquid each day.
- This is equal to 10 micrograms (mcg) or 400 international units (iu).

Record: we suggest that the supplement is handwritten onto the residents' MAR charts so administration can be recorded with any other medication and gives a complete record in one place.

Storage: as soon as the supplement is received:

- Write the name of each resident who will be receiving this supplement on the bottle (one bottle per resident), being careful not to cover up any important information e.g. expiry date/warnings.
- Store at the correct temperature in the medication room with other medication and comply with any instructions on the product label.
- The supplement is intended to last 4 months so it is important to carry forward supplies into consecutive months while fully observing any expiry dates.

Incidents or queries: Please seek advice from the GP or healthcare professional if you have further concerns or identify possibly adverse effects from these vitamin supplements.

If you have any questions regarding this newsletter or if you have an idea for an article to be included in a future issue, please contact us on Tel: 0191 2172558 where you will be forwarded to the most appropriate member of the team