

We are committed to providing our clients with services and medication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

We are currently living in extraordinary times, but please rest assured we are doing all that we can to adapt to the situation, maintain safety among our employees and ensure our clients still receive the same high quality level of support they have come to expect.

Any interruption to our services, including the supply of medication, medical products and clinical advice, could increase patient safety risks. We are committed to providing continuity for our clients, while also ensuring that the health of our employees and their families remains a top priority.

We have confidence in our business continuity plan, which has now been reviewed and adjusted to consider the unique risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The following risks have been highlighted:

1) Medicine and medical equipment shortages

- a) In the short to medium term, medication shortages should not be an issue. Although the global manufacture and distribution of medicines and medical equipment is susceptible to a loss of production, this industry operates with relatively long lead times. *Despite this, Ashtons is requesting contingency plans from suppliers and so far, feedback has been positive.*
- b) Steps to mitigate the risk of medicines shortages have already been taken by many healthcare providers, following the awareness of this issue raised by Brexit. *Ashtons advice to clients is to increase lead times for placing orders to allow for delays in supply.*
- c) There are problems in obtaining products such as surgical gloves, aprons, face masks, disinfectants and hand cleansers. *Ashtons will source wherever possible and supply alternatives where necessary. However, some issues are now occurring with the availability of various products. If necessary, we may ration certain products to ensure as many of our clients can obtain them as possible.*
- d) Product shortages could lead to price rises. *We are doing everything to minimise price rises. Ashtons will not increase prices unless price increases are imposed on us by our suppliers.*

2) Delivery problems to customers

- a) Ashtons use a national courier, DHL, to deliver medicines and are in constant contact to monitor the situation. *If severe problems occur, deliveries will be less frequent, and your orders will need to allow for this. Please re-order in plenty of time and we suggest you keep about four weeks of stock. You may need to obtain urgent items from a local community pharmacy.*

3) Protecting the workforce

- a) Ashtons has undertaken a comprehensive review of its operations as part of the business continuity plan and is working to reduce the risk of exposure for all parties. *We are currently putting plans in place to ensure those who can work from home are able to do so. For employees who must be on site, we are taking measures to ensure they are provided with a safe environment by applying strict health and safety protocols.*

4) Staff absenteeism

- a) Ashtons Staff could be unable to work due to self-isolation, caring for someone, or public transport problems. *Ashtons will focus on maintaining core functions to ensure medication is dispatched. Some visiting clinical pharmacists could be redeployed to our dispensary. Temporary, agency, or part-time staff will be utilised where necessary. For appropriate roles, staff will be encouraged to work from home. Staff will be advised of sickness benefits and have 'back-to-work' interviews.*

5) Hospitals, hospices and other customers with a lock-down due to COVID-19

- a) If any healthcare provider experiences a patient with COVID-19, the facility may become 'locked down' to maintain a quarantine. *The Ashtons visiting pharmacist would not be able to gain access. Clinical advice would be carried out remotely.*
- b) Medication requirements would likely increase due to increased patient morbidity and additional protection for employees. *Ashtons will continue to supply the hospital or hospice and our customer service team would provide additional support if required.*

Thank you for your continued trust and support. We are committed to being there for our clients and employees and will continue to keep you informed as the situation evolves.

If you have any further questions about this, due to staff beginning to work remotely please send queries in writing by email at customerservice@ahps.co.uk