

Prescribing tip for actioning



Equipment Required for the Safe Administration of Insulin

A [Patient Safety Alert](#)¹ was issued in 2016 highlighting the risk of severe harm and death due to withdrawing insulin from pen devices using insulin syringes. This is a ["never event"](#)

Insulin syringes should only ever be used when drawing up insulin from vials. The use of insulin vials is now less common with the majority of patients being prescribed insulin pens either as a:

- pre-filled disposable pen which already contains insulin and is thrown away once empty or
- a durable pen that can be reused with 3ml insulin cartridges.

Insulin pens are not manufactured with needles already attached. Needles must be prescribed separately and are single use only, available in boxes of 100. It is recommended that all patients using the durable pen have a spare device available in the event of breakage or loss. These can be prescribed on an FP10 prescription.

Pen needles must always be added to the prescription list whenever an insulin pen is prescribed

The [joint CCG and hospital formulary](#) provides further information about choice of pen needles, including which size to choose. It also lists circumstances when [safety pen needles](#) should be prescribed, the most common of which are when district nurses or Care Home nursing staff are administering insulin from a pen to a patient. Safety pen needles help to prevent needle stick injuries. (Similarly, insulin safety syringes are recommended if staff must administer insulin from a vial).

- The recommended local formulary option for pen needles which is compatible across all pen devices is **Glucorx CarePoint 4mm/31 gauge needles** for use when patients are self-administering insulin.
- If safety pen needles are required (see above), the first-line choice is **Glucorx 5mm/30 gauge safety pen needles**. Neon Verifine 5mm/31 gauge safety pen needles are recommended second-line if there are stock issues.

Please ensure all patients prescribed insulin have the following on their prescription list and the equipment has been issued:

- Option 1: Pre-filled disposable insulin pen + needles/safety needles
- Option 2: Durable pen device + 3ml insulin cartridges + needles/safety needles
- Option 3: Insulin vial + insulin syringes/insulin safety syringes

If further information is required about which equipment to prescribe alongside insulin, please contact the Medicines Optimisation Team. Community pharmacists are also able to provide advice about compatible devices and needles.

References:

1. [NHS England » Risk of severe harm and death due to withdrawing insulin from pen devices](#)
2. [CCG and LTHTr Guidance for the choice of test strips, meters, needles and lancets](#)

To contact the Medicines Optimisation Team please phone 01772 214302

If you have any suggestions for future topics to cover in our prescribing tips please contact Nicola.schaffel@nhs.net