



Absence from Work Certificates: Guidelines for Pharmacists

2018



Acknowledgements

The updating of Absence from Work Certificates: Guidelines for Pharmacist has included reviews by experts, and the consensus of organisations and individuals involved.

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) and The Pharmacy Guild of Australia (PGoA) thank all those involved in the review process.

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ISBN: 978-0-908185-96-2

Title: Absence from Work Certificates: Guidelines for Pharmacists

Date of Publication: September 2018



The Pharmacy
Guild of Australia

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Terminology

Please see the table below for definitions of terms commonly appearing in the Guidelines.

Term	Definition	Equivalent or related term
Certificate for Absence from Work	A certificate issued by a pharmacist stating that an employee is unable to attend work either due to illness or having to care for family or household member.	Certificate
Carer's leave	Paid or unpaid leave for employees who need to take time off from work to care for an immediate family or household member who is sick, injured or has an unexpected emergency.	
Employee	As defined under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> and respective State industrial relations legislation.	
Employment	Employment is the relationship between an employee and employer, where an employee performs work at the employer's direction in exchange for payment.	
Household member	Any person who lives with the person asking for an absence from work certificate.	
Immediate family member	A spouse or former spouse, de facto partner or former de facto partner, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of an employee, or a child, parent, grandparent, grandchild or sibling of an employee's spouse or de facto partner. It includes step-relations (e.g. step-parents and step-children) as well as adoptive relations.	
Medical certificate	A certificate signed by a medical practitioner.	
Medical practitioner	A practising medical practitioner registered with the Medical Board of Australia within the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), either under general registration or specialist registration.	General practitioner, doctor
Minor ailment	A condition (illness or injury) that is often self-limiting, with symptoms easily recognised and described by the patient, and falling within the scope of pharmacist knowledge and training to be able to treat (e.g. allergies, asthma, minor burns, colds and coughs, cold sores, constipation, pain, nausea and vomiting).	
Person	Refers to an employee as defined under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> and respective State industrial relations legislation.	
Personal leave	Paid or unpaid leave taken when a person is unable to attend work because of injury or illness.	Sick leave
Registered pharmacist	An individual holding general registration with the Pharmacy Board of Australia, as recorded on the online Register of practitioners on the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) website.	
Regulated health service	A service provided by, or usually provided by, a health practitioner (as defined in the National Law).	
Statutory declaration	A written statement declared to be true in front of an authorised witness.	
Work	The relationship between an employee and employer where an employee performs a job at the employer's direction in exchange for payment.	Employment
Workers' compensation	A form of insurance payment to employees if they are injured at work or become sick due to their work.	

References: AHPRA¹; Fair Work Ombudsman²; PSA Professional Practice Standards³; The Pharmacy Guild of Australia⁴; Fair Work Act 2009⁵; Medical Board of Australia⁶; National Board⁷.

Certificate for Absence from Work

Introduction

Certificate for Absence from Work is a form of evidence used to confirm that an employee is unable to attend work either due to illness, injury, or having to care for family or a household member. Other forms of evidence are medical certificates and statutory declarations. It is deemed within a registered pharmacist's scope of practice to issue a Certificate for Absence from Work, provided they are acting within their competency and professional expertise as a pharmacist.

Pharmacists are expected to limit the provision of certificates in accordance with their scope of practice that is primarily in relation to⁴:

- supply, compounding or dispensing of medicines
- provision of professional pharmacy services including advice on minor ailments and the effective and safe use of medicines.

However, it is the Pharmacy Board of Australia's expectation that each pharmacist is responsible for setting their own scope of practice. An intern pharmacist is a provisionally registered pharmacist who must be supervised by a registered pharmacist. He/she is able to perform the same duties as a pharmacist under supervision. The final decision and authorisation to issue a Certificate for Absence from Work sits with the supervising pharmacist.

Pharmacists need to exercise judgement when issuing a certificate and managing any associated risks; as it is the pharmacist's professional opinion that forms the basis for the certificate. Pharmacists must consider whether the illness or injury or need to provide care, which is the subject of the certificate, is within their recognised scope of practice. They must adhere to Pharmacy Board of Australia *Code of Conduct* and Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) *Professional Practice Standards*.

These Guidelines provide pharmacists with best practice guidance on issuing certificates for absence from work. This Guidance has

been developed to meet the *Fair Work Act 2009* requirements on evidence to support the need for an employee to be absent from the workplace. The Guidelines do not replace the need for pharmacists to exercise professional discretion and judgement when issuing a Certificate for Absence from Work.

These Guidelines do not include clinical information or detailed legislative requirements. At all times, pharmacists delivering this service must comply with all relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation.

Fair Work Act 2009


Under the *Fair Work Act 2009* and respective State industrial relations legislation, it is the responsibility of an employee to notify their place of work if they are going to be absent from work due to illness/injury or the need to care for a family or household member (i.e. sick or carer's leave). This should be done as soon as possible before the leave date, but can also occur after the leave has started. The employee should also specify how long they will be away from work or expect to be away from work. Employees may be required by their place of work to provide evidence for the need for leave, to verify certain types of absences from work.^{2,5}

Issuing certificates

A pharmacist can issue a Certificate for Absence from Work to a person (based on their scope of practice in which the practitioner is registered) for either:

- **personal leave** - if the person is not fit for work due to illness or injury (see Appendix 3)
- **carer's leave** - for a person to provide care or support to a family or household member who is sick or injured or affected by an emergency (see Appendix 4).

When requested to issue a Certificate for Absence from Work, pharmacists with the knowledge available to them concerning the person's condition, must consider if it is reasonable to provide the certificate. In forming a view about this, the pharmacist should consider whether sufficient information can be noted in the certificate to satisfy a 'reasonable person' (s107 (3) of the Act) of



the legitimacy of the person's absence from work. However, ultimately it is the employer's decision (as the 'reasonable person' in this instance) about whether they accept the legitimacy of the absence.

Pharmacists are not obliged to provide a Certificate for Absence from Work when requested.

Pharmacists are encouraged to conduct a face-to-face consultation with the person requesting a certificate physically present in the pharmacy. In situations where the person requesting the certificate is not physically present and other forms of communication are used, such as video conferencing or telephone, a pharmacist must exercise their judgement as to whether the information presented enables an effective consultation, and is sufficient for the pharmacist to issue a certificate. Pharmacists should also consider limiting the period of time off work to one day in these situations. Refer to *Period of time off work* for more information.

Carer's leave

An employee can request carer's leave to care for or support a member of their immediate family or household who is sick, injured or has an unexpected emergency. Employees may have to give notice or evidence to get paid for carer's leave.⁵

When a certificate is issued for carer's leave, it certifies that the member of the person's household or immediate family is ill or injured and that the person is required to care for or support the member.

The pharmacist must be satisfied that the family/household member is ill or injured, and requires care. Therefore, it is recommended that a pharmacist conduct a consultation with the ill or injured family/household member and the person requesting the certificate for carer's leave. However, this may not always be practical. Where this is not practical, a pharmacist would need to use their own judgment to verify the legitimacy of the carer's request (e.g. the person is well known to the pharmacist or the person provides hospital discharge notes etc.).

Member of a person's household

As the Act does not define 'a member of a person's household', the pharmacist will need to exercise their own judgment when considering whether or not the ill/injured individual is a household member of the person requesting a certificate, and what evidence is required as proof. As a general guide, they must live in the same house but the household member need not be related to the person.

About the consultation

Issuing a Certificate for Absence from Work requires the pharmacist to:

- provide the person with information about the service (verbally or written) - see Appendix 1. For example, written information can be provided from a template.
- conduct a consultation
- complete a record of consultation and make an assessment of whether or not to issue a certificate in relation to the illness or injury (see Appendix 2)
- complete a certificate, if one is to be issued (see Appendices 3 and 4)
- store the necessary records in an appropriate manner (refer to *Documentation* for more information).

Before the consultation

Pharmacists should provide complete, truthful and accurate information about the service (including cost) prior to conducting the consultation.⁸

Before commencing the service, the pharmacist must ensure that the person requesting a certificate understands the following criteria:

- a certificate issued by a pharmacist is generally not acceptable for purposes other than as evidence to support a person's absence from work on personal leave or carer's leave
- a pharmacist is not a medical practitioner and therefore cannot provide a medical certificate
- any opinion will be or has been provided as a pharmacist, not as a medical practitioner

- the consultation is not intended to replace medical treatment, opinion or diagnosis, and that if the illness or injury persists or worsens, medical attention must be sought
- they should confirm with their employer or person requesting the Certificate for Absence from Work that a certificate from a pharmacist will be acceptable
- they will be participating in a consultation with the pharmacist
- they will provide the pharmacist with a truthful, complete and accurate description of the reasons for requesting a certificate (which should be documented by the pharmacist)
- they will provide the pharmacist with any documentation relating to their request for a certificate – this may include, but is not limited to, prescriptions and previous certificates
- they will present the reasons for requesting a certificate in a way that enables the pharmacist to make an accurate assessment of their eligibility for a certificate within the pharmacist's scope of practice.

After issuing the certificate, pharmacists should also repeat this information (see Appendix 1).

During the consultation

During the consultation, the pharmacist should consider whether or not the injury or illness would prevent the person from attending work completely, or whether the person could perform light duties. Making this determination should involve consideration of the seriousness of the injury or illness, the person's job and duties, and any other considerations that are relevant to whether or not the person is fit to attend work.

Certificate for Absence from Work cannot be backdated.

Period of time off work

During the consultation, a pharmacist must assess both the nature of the illness or injury, and the person's ability to attend work and perform their duties; to determine the period off work for which the certificate will be provided.

Within a pharmacist's scope of practice, he/she can issue certificates that relate to **minor ailments**. The period of time for which the person is likely to be issued a certificate is up to two days.⁴ A pharmacist must use their discretion and decide if it is within their scope of practice to issue a certificate for longer than two days. A pharmacist must also consider whether the person can safely return to work and not compromise the safety of others at work. In cases where a pharmacist considers a person may require longer periods off work, they should consider referral to a medical practitioner.

The date of absence must not commence on a date other than the date the pharmacist had a consultation.

A pharmacist should not issue certificates for long periods, particularly where the illness or injury may require a consultation with a medical practitioner. People with chronic medical conditions, should generally be under the care of a medical practitioner. However the pharmacist should use their professional judgement to consider if a certificate for a short time (e.g. 1 or 2 days) may be appropriate while the patient is able to make an appointment to see their doctor.

For further guidance about the period off work to recommend, refer to the Pharmacy Guild of Australia *Reference Guide – Issuing certificates for absence of work involving minor conditions in pharmacy*.

Content of certificate

A Certificate for Absence from Work is a legal document. As health practitioners are subject to professional discipline and can be deregistered for issuing false, backdated or negligent certificates, this legal responsibility would reasonably apply to pharmacists when issuing certificates. The sample templates provided at Appendices 3 and 4 contain the requirements for a Certificate for Absence from Work, and are summarised below.



When completing a Certificate for Absence from Work, the certificate must:

- be legible
- be written in plain English (i.e. no jargon or abbreviations)
- include the name of the employee and /or carer
- include information based on facts known to the pharmacist (i.e. gathered from their own observations and/or obtained from the person requesting the certificate)
- include issue date of the certificate
- include dates that the pharmacist believes the person will be unable to attend work
- include name, address and contact details (e.g. phone number) of the pharmacist issuing the certificate
- include qualification or AHPRA number of the pharmacist.

The pharmacist should document the patient consultation (see Appendix 2 - Record of a request for a Certificate for Absence from Work).

Outside scope of practice

A pharmacist may decide that the illness or injury is not within their scope of practice. In this case, they should not issue a certificate, and should advise the person to seek a consultation for the condition with a medical practitioner or other appropriate registered healthcare provider.^{4,8}

Pharmacists are not able to issue a certificate that states a person is fit to return to work. Pharmacists are encouraged to refer patients requesting a certificate for a workers' compensation related claim. Patients may require further or ongoing assessment of fitness to return to work, and this is beyond the scope of practice of a pharmacist. A certificate from a pharmacist may not be sufficient for insurance purposes or certain workplace requirements. It is recommended that a pharmacist refer the patient to a medical practitioner and their employer for further advice. For more information on workers' compensation, consult relevant State or Territory legislation.

Pharmacists are not able to provide certificates for pregnancy-related requests or for compassionate leave (although the latter is not expressly excluded under the Act⁵). However a pharmacist may consider it is within their scope of practice to issue a certificate to a pregnant woman for a minor ailment.

Where a certificate is required for a purpose other than as proof of personal/carer's absence from work, a certificate issued by a pharmacist may not be sufficient. In this case, the pharmacist should communicate this to the person seeking a certificate, and guide them to seek advice from the person or organisation requiring the certificate as to whether a certificate issued by a pharmacist will be sufficient.

It is recommended that a pharmacist should not issue a Certificate for Absence from Work as an extension to a person's existing certificate. The person is best referred to a medical practitioner for advice.

Refusal to supply a certificate should be recorded in the pharmacy's documentation system.

Refer to *Declining issuing of certificates*.

Referral to a medical practitioner

Pharmacists should not issue certificates for illnesses or injuries that may require a consultation with a medical practitioner. Minor ailments are considered within the scope of a pharmacist's practice. Work place injuries are covered under the *Workplace Injury and Compensation Act 2013*, and should be referred to a medical practitioner.^{4,9}

A pharmacist must only issue a certificate in relation to an illness or injury that is within the scope of his or her practice. If the pharmacist issues a certificate in relation to an illness or injury that is outside their scope of practice, the pharmacist may be exposed to claims, including, but not limited to, negligence or a breach of professional practice.

Conflict of interest

Pharmacists should not issue certificates of absence from work for themselves, or members of their immediate family, or household members. A pharmacy should have a policy regarding issuing of certificates to staff within the pharmacy.

Declining issuing of certificates

Pharmacists are not under any obligation to issue certificates of absence from work when requested. Pharmacists must use their professional judgement to decide whether they should issue these certificates in certain circumstances (see Box 1). The circumstances in which a pharmacist would decline to issue a certificate should be detailed in the pharmacy's policy regarding issuing certificates for absence from work. If a certificate is refused, the reason should be documented by the pharmacist (see Appendix 2).

If a pharmacist is subjected to pressure, or feels uncomfortable or unsure about issuing a certificate at any time, the pharmacist should decline the request to provide a certificate. The event should be documented (see Appendix 2).

If a pharmacist does not issue a certificate (following a consultation, or because the pharmacy has adopted a policy of not issuing certificates), appropriate guidance should be provided to the person, such as referring them to a medical practitioner or their employer to discuss the options.

Pharmacists can reduce the potential for any associated risks of issuing certificates by following organisational policies or standards of behaviour, and ensuring adequate documentation of a consultation and maintaining its record. For more information regarding minimising risk, see the Pharmacy Board of Australia *Code of Conduct*.⁹

Box 1. Examples of circumstances where a pharmacist may decline to issue a certificate.

- Request is for compassionate or maternity leave.
- The person's illness or injury requires immediate medical attention.
- The person is capable of performing work duties and is not a danger to others.
- The person is requesting absence for a long period of time.
- Absence certificate is requested to cover other obligations or events e.g. court, sporting events, educational facilities such as schools. Please note a pharmacist is able to issue a certificate for absence from work for a minor ailment to a person under 18 years of age who is working legally.
- Pharmacist is subjected to pressure, or feels uncomfortable or unsure about issuing a certificate.
- Pharmacist believes that the person has been untruthful.
- The person requesting the certificate is not physically present (e.g. a phone request or through a third party).
- There are potential conflicts of interest e.g. requests from family members or pharmacy staff.
- Request for certificate relates to a worker's compensation claim.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of examples. There may be other circumstances where a pharmacist may refuse to issue a certificate.

Providing the service

Allocating resources

If issuing certificates of absence from work is to be offered through a pharmacy, consider allocating the necessary resources (e.g. informing staff about the service, assigning responsibilities, training staff, and establishing policies and systems). This will ensure any requests for certificates can be responded to appropriately.

Privacy and confidentiality

Pharmacists must respect and safeguard a consumer's privacy and confidentiality at all times¹⁰, particularly in relation to information acquired in the course of issuing certificates.

Pharmacists should refer to the privacy guidelines^{11,12} as well as any State/Territory privacy legislation or health privacy frameworks. Pharmacists must also meet the relevant professional standards (e.g. PSA *Professional practice standards criterion 3 of Fundamental Pharmacy Practice standard⁵*) in the provision of certificates.

The consultation must be conducted in a private and confidential environment without distractions or interruptions.

Documentation

For insurance and legal reasons, it is recommended that pharmacists keep the following records:

- record of the request for a certificate (see Appendix 2).
- copy of the final certificate issued (e.g. photocopy, carbon copy or second printed copy, electronic copy).

An employer (to whom a certificate has been presented by an employee) may, with the written consent of the employee, seek further information from the pharmacist who issued the certificate. An employer may only request further information where such information is reasonably required, for example disputes or formal investigations. Pharmacists will need to maintain documentation so that these requests can be addressed as necessary.

All documentation must be stored in a secure and confidential manner while still being retrievable by authorised pharmacy staff.

Documents should be maintained according to relevant State or Territory legislation.

Generally it is required that all documentation be retained as follows:

- in the case of documentation collected while the individual was an adult – for seven years from the last consultation; and
- in the case of documentation collected while the individual was under the age of 18 years – until this individual attains the age of 25.

Fee for service

Pharmacists are entitled to charge for issuing a Certificate for Absence from Work. They can determine how much to charge. The fee should reflect the period of consultation and other business infrastructure costs.

Pharmacists should also consider whether they will charge a fee if they conduct a consultation but do not issue a certificate.

The person should be advised of the fee for service prior to the commencement of the consultation.

Advertising

Advertising can be a useful way to communicate the services a pharmacy provides to the public. Health practitioners are required to comply with National Law or any other relevant legislation on advertising regulated health services. Pharmacists must ensure that advertising of a service does not contain false or misleading information, and does not encourage unnecessary or indiscriminate use of a regulated health service that leads a consumer to purchase or undergo a service that they do not require.⁷

For more information refer to *Guidelines for advertising regulated health services*.⁷

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Appendix 1 – Sample information sheet for people requesting a certificate

Asking for a Certificate for Absence from Work?

Ask your employer **FIRST** if a certificate issued by a pharmacist will be satisfactory.

Do's & Don'ts

- Pharmacists can only issue a certificate (*Fair Work Act 2009*) if you are required to be absent from work due to:
 - personal illness/ injury OR
 - the need to care for a member of your family/household who is ill/injured.
- Pharmacists can only issue certificates:
 - if in his/her professional opinion you are unfit for your work
 - in relation to illnesses or injuries they are professionally qualified to assess. Advice is provided as a pharmacist, not as a medical practitioner
 - from the date that the consultation took place
- Your information collected by the pharmacist will not be used for any other purpose or disclosed to a third party unless you provide your consent.

A consultation with a pharmacist is not intended to replace medical treatment or diagnosis. If your illness/injury persists or worsens, visit your doctor.

You need to:

- confirm with your employer that a certificate issued by a pharmacy is acceptable
- give a complete and accurate description of your reasons for requesting a certificate, provide medical history where required and answer questions truthfully
- give your certificate issued by the pharmacist to your employer as soon as possible
- ensure that the certificate has all the information required by your employer.

Your pharmacist needs to:

- provide a private and confidential environment for your consultation
- accurately assess whether you are unfit for your work, or whether your family/household member requires your care
- if appropriate, to provide a written certificate stating the days for which you will require leave from work.

Important to know:

Pharmacists can charge a fee to issue a certificate for absence from work. Check the cost with your pharmacist before requesting one.

If a pharmacist is unable or unwilling to issue you with a certificate, and you believe you are unfit for your work, you should seek the opinion of a medical practitioner.

This sample sheet has been provided as part of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA)/Pharmacy Guild of Australia (PGoA) Guidelines for pharmacist issuing certificates for absence from work. While these have been developed with legal advice, PSA and PGoA are not responsible for any amendments made to the documents nor for the manner in which the documents may be used by pharmacists for specific circumstances.

Appendix 2 – Sample of pharmacist’s record of consultation in relation to a request for a certificate

Record of a request for a Certificate for Absence from Work		
Inform the person requesting a certificate:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you are not a medical practitioner and any opinion you have provided has been provided as a pharmacist, and not as a medical practitioner • the consultation will be conducted for the purpose of assessing the person’s fitness for work or reasons for carer’s leave, and is not intended to replace medical treatment, opinion or diagnosis • if the illness/injury persists or worsens, they should see a medical practitioner. 		
Date of consultation for certificate		
Full name and address of the person seeking a certificate	Name	
	Address	
Person is seeking a certificate for:	Personal leave	Carer’s leave
If the person is seeking a certificate for carer’s leave, are you satisfied that it is in relation to a member of the person’s immediate family or household?	Yes	No
	If yes, provide evidence :	
If the certificate is for carer’s leave, the family/ household member’s details are:	Immediate family	Household member
	Household member’s name:	
What is the illness/injury as described by the person or family/household member?		
What are the visible symptoms of the person’s or family/household member’s illness/injury?		
When did the symptoms first arise?		
If an injury, where did the injury occur?		
Has the person or family/household member consulted a medical practitioner in relation to the illness/injury?	Yes	No
	If yes, document the date of consultation	

Is there a prior Certificate for Absence from Work or a medical certificate?	Yes	No
	If yes, document details and date of documentation	
Is there a prescription to be filled?	Yes	No
	If yes, document details and date of documentation	
What medication is being provided by you (the pharmacist) for the person's or family/household member's illness/injury?		
For what length of time has the person or family/household member been off work?		
What length of time does the person believe they need off work		
Within your capacity as a pharmacist and based on the available information, are you satisfied that the person is unfit for work, or that the member is sufficiently ill/injured to require care?	Yes	No
	If yes, document dates of leave that the certificate will cover	
	From	To
Have you referred the person to his/her medical practitioner, if required?	Yes	No
	If yes, document reason for referral	
Name of pharmacist who conducted the consultation		
Signature of the pharmacist		
Date		

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Appendix 3 – Sample template of a Certificate for Absence from Work for personal leave

Certificate for personal leave

This certificate is to certify that on

Mr Mrs Ms Miss Not specified
(insert full name)

of
(insert address)

presented at this pharmacy.

In my professional opinion, based on the information provided to me at the time,
he she not specified will be unfit to attend work for the period commencing
..... until

This opinion was provided in my capacity as a pharmacist for the purpose of informing the employer of the named person that they are unfit for work due to illness/injury.

This certificate was provided by

..... (.....)
(Pharmacist's name) *(AHPRA Registration number)*

in accordance with the evidence requirements under section 107(3) of the Fair Work Act 2009 at

.....
.....
.....

(Pharmacy address)

OR *(Pharmacy stamp/sticker)*

Signed: Date:

While these have been developed with legal advice, PSA and PGoA are not responsible for any amendments made to the template documents nor for the manner in which the documents may be used by pharmacists for specific circumstances.

Appendix 4 – Sample template of a Certificate for Absence from Work for carer’s leave

Certificate for carer’s leave

This certificate is to certify that on

Mr Mrs Ms Miss Not specified

(*‘the carer’*)

presented to this pharmacy in relation to a member of their immediate family/household

Mr Mrs Ms Miss Not specified

(*‘the member’*)

In my professional opinion, based on the information provided to me at the time, the member will require the carer to provide care/support for the period commencing

..... until

As a result, the carer will be unable to attend work for the period detailed above.

This opinion was provided in my capacity as a pharmacist for the purpose of informing the employer of the named carer that their immediate family/household member requires their care/support due to illness/injury.

This certificate was provided by

.....

(*Pharmacist’s name*)

(.....)

(*AHPRA Registration number*)

in accordance with the evidence requirements under section 107(3) of the Fair Work Act 2009 at

.....

.....

(*Pharmacy address*)

OR

(*Pharmacy stamp/sticker*)

Signed:

Date:

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