

European Healthcare Distribution Association (GIRP) – update regarding medicines supply related to COVID-19

23 March 2020

GIRP, the European Healthcare Distribution Association, is the umbrella organisation for full-service healthcare distributors in Europe. It represents the national associations of over 750 full-service healthcare distributors serving 34 European countries, as well as major international and pan-European full-service healthcare distribution companies.

Every day, GIRP members keep the supply of all medicines, medicinal products and devices flowing to over 170,000 EU pharmacies, hospitals, clinics and other healthcare sites. Our members employ over 140,000 people and distribute around 15 billion packs of medicines as well as a wide range of healthcare products per year.

GIRP would like to recognise the employees of our members especially those working in distribution centres and drivers for their brave and dedicated commitment to working relentlessly throughout this crisis period.

Like many other organisations, GIRP members are putting in place business continuity contingency plans. Full-service healthcare distributors are sharing best practice and preparedness responses with one another, and with partners, to ensure the best possible outcome for patients.

Executive Summary

1. Given the essential role carried out by full-service healthcare distributors in medicines distribution, GIRP calls that they be recognised as part of the critical infrastructure in all countries.
2. To ensure continuous supply of medicines, GIRP calls on national competent authorities to enable stock optimisation measures implemented by full-service healthcare distributors or their customers.
3. GIRP calls for the 'Green Lanes' for vehicles carrying medicines and medical supplies across all EU/EEA territories to enable quick and efficient transport.

Critical infrastructure

Full-service healthcare distributors are critical to the functioning of all national healthcare systems by ensuring the continuity of medicines supplies. Alongside pharmacists and key healthcare personnel, they are recognised in some EU Member States as part of the critical infrastructure.

As COVID-19 continues to intensify and quarantine / lockdowns / restrictive measures are imposed by national authorities, it is essential that full-service healthcare distributors can maintain staffing levels and services, including deliveries to and within quarantined / locked-down / restricted areas.

The critical infrastructure status would confer full-service healthcare distributors the means to ensure the stability needed to maintain the necessary activity levels for medicines distribution, which could include among others:

1. Special permits for drivers to allow access to quarantined / locked-down / restricted areas and to travel without restrictions
2. Staff permitted to travel to job sites
3. Special status for premises to have "rapid decontamination" or deep cleans, if required.
4. Staff access to on-duty schools and creches, where possible;
5. Staff access to special funding measures, where possible
6. Support from army or police, if necessary

GIRP calls on national authorities, which have not done so yet to urgently classify full-service healthcare distributors as critical infrastructure to maintain the continuous supply of medicines and access relevant national resources where needed.

Ordering

Demand for medicines has risen considerably in recent days, calling for significantly increased efforts from pharmacies, hospitals and all affected service providers, who are doing an outstanding job. The same applies to the full-service healthcare distributors represented by our membership. They have been investing in staff, systems and stock during the last weeks to maintain the continuous supply of medicines and medicinal products.

GIRP calls on all national competent authorities to enable stock optimisation measures introduced by full-service healthcare distributors or their customers to restrict deliveries or the number of products dispensed to ensure availability of products for other pharmacies, hospitals, clinics or patients who also need treatment.

Border closures and transport restrictions

GIRP would also like to emphasise the urgent need for full-service healthcare distributors' vehicles to freely circulate within the EU Member States as well as across borders.

GIRP warmly welcomes Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's video address and fully agrees with her statement made: "[We have to keep cross-border transport of supplies flowing, in particular that of medical products](#)".

We also welcome the European Commission's moves to rapidly establish [guidelines](#) for EU Member States to put in place 'green lanes' for the transport of medicines. We urge that the guidelines will be implemented quickly at national level.

European solidarity is crucial at this moment and further call on EU Member States to refrain from imposing blanket export restrictions on medicines or close borders to medicines movements restricting transportation of medicines from production sites to dispensing points. Physical access to medicines, especially imports, in these exceptional times must remain a priority and export restrictions should only be applied to the extent necessary for emergency public health reasons.

GIRP calls for the 'Green Lanes' for vehicles carrying medicines and medical supplies should be ensured across all EU/EEA territories.

GIRP stands ready to support our members, the EU COVID-19 response team, the European Commission and national health authorities and all relevant agencies to prepare for and tackle the ongoing outbreak of the virus.