

**Date:** 01 August 2025

**From:** Office of the Chief Clinical Officer

Audience: All clinicians potentially prescribing or administering Bicillin L-A

**RE: Bicillin – update on current situation with advice to all users. Please note the ‘Immediate Actions for services’**

### **Situation / Timeline**

1. Pfizer, the supplier of Bicillin L-A advised of a potential global recall due to particulate matter found in some syringes. This was traced to a manufacturing issue involving new bungs and quarantined their NZ stock.
2. A Product Alert was issued by Pfizer 25 July 2025. Pharmac followed that Alert with a Supply Issue notification 30 July 2025.
3. HNZN identified a potentially impacted Bicillin L-A syringe 31 July 2025, with discoloured sediment seen on visual inspection. Pharmac, Medsafe and Pfizer were notified.
4. 01 August 2025, Pfizer has reviewed the scenario is happy to release the quarantined Bicillin L-A stock.

### **Context**

Global shortages of Bicillin L-A have been ongoing since late 2023. New Zealand has so far maintained a secure supply for rheumatic fever (RF) and syphilis treatment. A recent stock take shows sufficient but limited stock for the week, with additional stock of Bicillin L-A being released 01 August 2025 following Pfizer’s internal clearance.

An alternative formulation (Benzetacil) is available under Section 29. Transitioning to this product may have operational impacts. Further guidance will be provided if use becomes necessary.

### **Immediate Actions for Services**

- Ensure all nurses administering Bicillin L-A are aware of the product alert and continue to be vigilant and inspect syringes before use.
- Ensure any nurses or Pharmacists handling the product follow the instructions if they suspect a syringe to be contaminated.
  - Quarantine the syringe, do not administer, do not discard
  - Notify your district chief pharmacist
- Escalate any immediate stock issues to your pharmacy supplier, who will coordinate with national procurement.

**In the event of a future Bicillin L-A shortage**

Note that alternative formulations of Bicillin L-A are dry-powder formulations and not pre-mixed syringes and are almost **double the volume** of injection.

**Prioritise:** Bicillin L-A over alternatives where possible for patients with a high risk of an adverse outcome, and who may not tolerate a larger volume injection:

- Young children.
- Children and young people with special needs.
- Children and adults who have already experienced a recurrence of rheumatic fever.
- Pregnant women requiring treatment for syphilis .

**Conserve** the remaining stock of Bicillin L-A for prioritization:

- Transition patients from subcutaneous injection for rheumatic fever (RF) secondary prophylaxis onto intramuscular injections.
- Review older patients on RF secondary prophylaxis who may be ready for discharge.

**Note alternatives to Bicillin L-A are available if required****Alternative options for rheumatic fever prophylaxis**

- Section 29 benzathine benzylpenicillin formulations (e.g. Benzetacil)
  - Must be individually prescribed by a doctor (not under a standing order).
  - Patients must be informed and provide consent.
  - May require different administration techniques and equipment.
- Oral prophylaxis (penicillin V or erythromycin)
  - Less effective than injectable BPG.
  - Requires strict adherence to twice-daily dosing.
  - Consider support tools such as blister packs and monthly dispensing.

**Alternative options for syphilis treatment.**

- Section 29 benzathine benzylpenicillin formulations (e.g. Benzetacil) as above
- Oral doxycycline (should not be given in pregnancy)

**Further Information**

For further clinical queries, please liaise with your local RF or sexual health service leads.

Ngā mihi/Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'HSL', written in a cursive style.

**Prof Dame Helen Stokes-Lampard DBE PhD FRCGP FLSW**

**National Chief Medical Officer on behalf of the National Chief Clinical Officer**

**Office of the National Chief Clinical Officer**