

# How to manage EPS technical failures

The EPS service is made up of a number of key components ranging from the local system in your dispensary (see diagram opposite which outlines EPS within the larger NHS IT system) to the centrally held database which is commonly referred to as the NHS 'Spine'. Whilst the NHS centrally manages some of these components, individual system suppliers are responsible for the provision of others. Technical issues may occur in your pharmacy which impact on your ability to download electronic prescriptions and it is critical that all pharmacy staff know what to do and who to contact to ensure minimum disruption in your pharmacy and to patients.

Issue	Point of Failure (examples)	Who might you contact if needed?
Local	Broadband or pharmacy system	Internet Service Provider or local helpdesk (this may be your head office for multiples, or your system supplier)
National	Authentication Spine messaging N3	Local helpdesk (this may be your head office for multiples, or your system supplier)

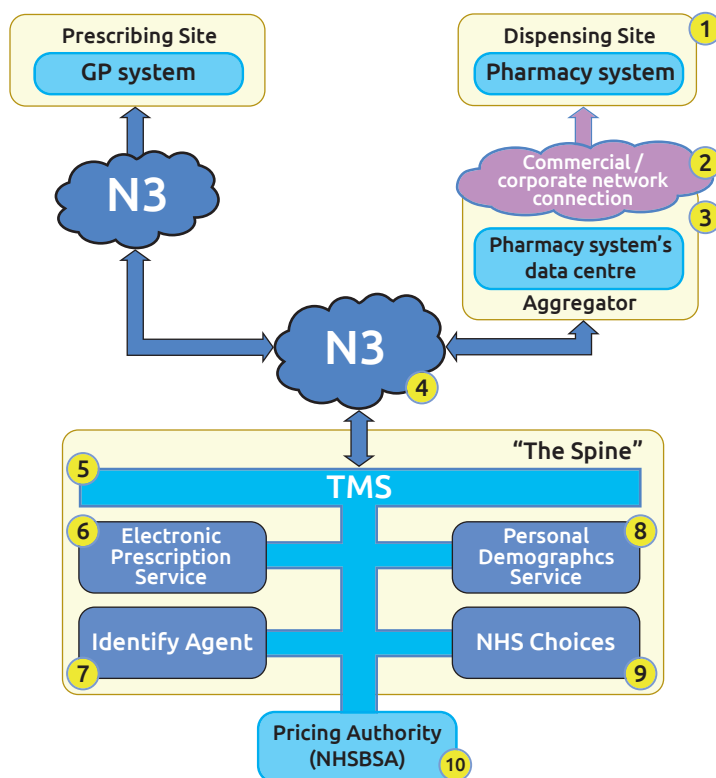
## Where could the failure occur?

Please note, you can choose to receive text or email alerts telling you when there is an incident affecting EPS at a national level (for example with a dispensing system, authentication, Spine messaging or N3) and when it has been resolved. Download and complete the form from [tinyurl.com/spinealerts](https://tinyurl.com/spinealerts) and email it back to [servicebridge@hscic.gov.uk](mailto:servicebridge@hscic.gov.uk). You will receive an alert from HSCIC when the system is unavailable and another alert when normal service is resumed. You should also check what communications you will receive from your system supplier if there is a system-specific issue which affects your pharmacy.

## How to prepare for an EPS outage

A troubleshooting guide is available from HSCIC ([tinyurl.com/epstroubleshoot](https://tinyurl.com/epstroubleshoot)) which is designed to help pharmacy staff take the appropriate steps in the event of an issue with EPS. You should have a business continuity plan in place which covers all the possible failures in the pharmacy and how to resolve or work round them. This could include:

- **Spare equipment:** Holding spares in the event of an essential piece of equipment breaking e.g. barcode scanner.
- **Local internet loss:** Developing back up plans in the event of losing local broadband connection e.g. you can discuss 3G or secondary broadband options with your system supplier.
- **Working with GPs:** Have discussions with your local GPs about how to deal with possible outages.
- **Using the Tracker:** Understanding the information that can be provided by the Prescription Tracker – this will work even if your local PMR system is down.
- **Training:** Making sure all staff are briefed on what to do in the event of an outage.



- **Temporary Access Card:** Talk to your local registration authority (RA) about getting a short-term access card. If you don't have contact details for your RA, ask your local NHS England team.
- **Plan contingency actions:** Agreeing the action you will take for each patient scenario e.g. asking the patient to return to the pharmacy at a later time or emergency supply (see below).

## How to approach an EPS outage

When deciding what action to take for patients you should consider where the issue lies. This will help you to decide on who to report the issue to. Other considerations:

- **Delay collection:** Patient to return to the pharmacy at a later time (if prescription not required immediately).
- **Deliver later:** Deliver prescriptions to patient when systems are resumed.
- **Emergency supply:** At the request of the prescriber.
- **Paper FP10 prescriptions:** Printed by arrangement with the GP surgery.
- **Referral to another pharmacy** (not suitable for some scenarios).

To help you prepare, you can download an example plan and a checklist, and read more information at: [psnc.org.uk/bcp](https://psnc.org.uk/bcp).

## Three things you can do now

- ✓ Sign up for the NHS Spine alerts
- ✓ Make all staff aware of your business continuity plan
- ✓ Download a copy of the troubleshooting guide