

Acceptable Abbreviations

for Prescription Health Product Labels in Canada

The abbreviations listed are deemed acceptable for prescription health product labels in Canada. This list was developed using the Principles for the Use of Abbreviations on Prescription Health Product Labels in Canada and after careful consideration by internal and external stakeholders. Use of an abbreviation from this list on a product label does not imply that Health Canada has approved the product itself. Each prescription health product name, label, and package submission is always thoroughly reviewed within its unique context, by Health Canada, before approval for marketing is granted.

* The meaning of any of these abbreviations should be explained in full at least once elsewhere in the labelling (e.g., side panel). By exception, and only if necessary because of space limitations, labels affixed to small containers (e.g., vials, ampoules) may use any of these abbreviations without definition, provided that the outer labelling (e.g., carton) spells out the term in full.

† “Extended release” is preferably abbreviated as “XR” because of its lower risk of misinterpretation (relative to “ER” or “XL”, which may be misinterpreted as “emergency response”, or as “extra-large” pack size/ formulation, respectively).

‡ For labelling purposes, “microgram” should be abbreviated as “mcg” instead of the SI unit, “µg”. The Greek letter “µ” may be difficult to see in some print and size formats and may be misread as the letter “m” (i.e., misread as “mg” meaning “milligrams”, rather than the intended “µg” meaning “micrograms”).

§ The 2-letter abbreviations for months of the year are compatible with both English and French, which is a unique consideration in Canada. It is possible that “JN” will be mistakenly interpreted as “January” instead of “June”; however, this potential misinterpretation would result in a product being discarded prematurely, rather than being used beyond its expiry date, so carries no health risk. The same would apply if “MA” were interpreted as “March” rather than “May”.

Available at <https://www.ismp-canada.org/download/AcceptableAbbreviations-ISMPCanada.pdf>



Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada
Institut pour la sécurité des médicaments aux patients du Canada

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Abbreviation ACCEPTED MEANING

MEDICATION NAME*	CR EC LA SR XR	controlled release enteric coated long-acting slow or sustained release extended release [†]
ROUTE OF ADMINISTRATION	IM IV	intramuscular intravenous
DOSAGE STRENGTH	kg g mg mcg L mL mEq mg/kg mg/m² mol mmol	kilogram gram milligram microgram [‡] litre millilitre milliequivalent milligram(s) per kilogram milligram(s) per square metre mole millimole
DOSAGE FORM*	amp cap inj oint tab	ampoule capsule injection ointment tablet
CALENDAR MONTH [§]	JA FE MR AL MA JN JL AU SE OC NO DE	January February March April May June July August September October November December
DAY OF THE WEEK	Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat	Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday
OTHER	BMI BSA DIN Exp Lot	body mass index body surface area drug identification number expiry date lot number