

Codeine What every Employer needs to know about these changes

From 1 February 2018, medicines containing codeine will no longer be available over the counter. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has made a ruling that all codeine containing medications in Australia will only be available with a prescription from a Medical Practitioner.

These changes will have an impact on many workplace drug and alcohol policies. We have prepared this short article to help you better understand these changes and be appropriately informed. Many common pain relief and cold & flu medications contain codeine. Up until 1 February 2018, codeine containing medications had been widely used and easily accessible through community pharmacies.

The TGA has placed tighter restrictions on the access to codeine medications, as there is a subset of the Australian population who use codeine medication in excess. Excess use of codeine can have significant detrimental impact on one's health long term, including complications such as liver and kidney damage. Whilst these changes are relatively new, we can expect to see continued use of codeine medications in the workplace. Many individuals may have legitimately purchased medications containing codeine prior to 1 February 2018. During this transition period, it is important for employers to understand that the use of codeine is not illicit, therefore using codeine containing medications purchased before the 1 February 2018 is legal.

Workplace drug and alcohol screening in Australia will continue to detect the codeine medications as per AS/NZS 4308:2008. Should an employee record a confirmed positive drug test outcome for the use of codeine medication, the employer should request medical information from the employees treating doctor to ascertain if the employee is currently fit for work. Failure of the employee to provide medical evidence of a Medical Practitioner prescribing the use of codeine, would suggest the employee is not fit for work.

