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## Ask the expert: out of date eyewash

External Author: [Alcumus8](#) September 2015

Category: [First aid](#)

### Question:

We keep a stock of emergency eyewash ampoules in a prominent position in case of chemical splashes. We check the ampoules from time to time and have recently found they are beyond their expiry date. They appear to be in good condition. Can we still use them?

### Answer:

Would you keep out of date food in your fridge? The HSE's guidance is clear: you should take care to dispose of first aid consumables after they reach their expiry date. This is echoed by training providers such as St John Ambulance.

Beyond their expiry dates, products will start to deteriorate and may not be as effective. Some containers, such as bottles and bags, contain materials that could leech into the product over a period of time beyond expiration. Of course, any changes to the saline liquid after the expiry date would be gradual rather than overnight.

Emergency eyewash is for irrigation only and works by mechanically flushing contaminants out of the eye. Ampoules do not contain enough liquid to treat a chemical burn, they are generally effective for dirt and debris only. If mains tap water is not readily available for eye irrigation, you should provide at least one litre of sterile water or sterile normal saline (0.9% w/v) in sealed, disposable containers.

Mains water can be effective for flushing chemicals out of the eye, but isn't always easily accessible.

You need to assess how long it would take to walk the casualty to the tap, bearing in mind that chemical irritants or corrosives will cause immediate injury to the eye. Seconds count in these circumstances. Is it possible to hold the casualty's head at the correct angle under the running water? Imagine doing this exercise under a domestic sink tap and you can see the difficulty.

Emergency eyewash bottles contain a buffered, sterile saline solution, superior to tap water in an emergency. They can also be mounted close to where they will be needed, so be readily available for use.

All eye injuries caused by chemical exposure should be referred to hospital as soon as possible after flushing.

So my recommendation is to bin your outdated ampoules and replace them with an emergency eyewash station containing at least two 500ml bottles of sterile eye wash solution, and keep an eye on those dates.

*Keith Rhodes, senior consultant, [Alcumus Compliance](#), a leading health, safety and environmental consultancy whose specialists develop tailored and workable solutions.*

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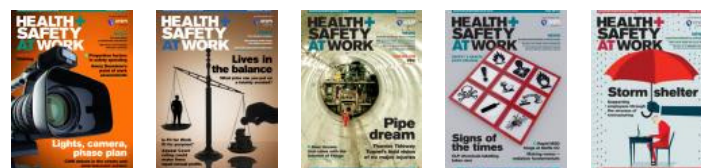
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