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Pharmacy and Emergency Service — Medications, Prescriptions, and Emergency Pharmacy

How the pharmacy system works in Germany, which medications require prescriptions, and how to find an emergency pharmacy at night.

Deutsche Begriffe: Apotheke | Notdienst | Notapotheke | Rezeptpflicht | Medikamente | Zuzahlung

The Pharmacy System in Germany

Germany has over **18,000 pharmacies** — they are the **only** places where medications can be sold (unlike many other countries where some medications are available in supermarkets).

You recognize pharmacies by the red "**A**" with a serpent and bowl (Asclepius staff) — the official pharmacy symbol.

Opening Hours

- **Regular:** Mon–Fri: 8:00–18:30, Sat: 8:00–13:00 (varies)
- **Many pharmacies:** Extended hours (until 20:00 or later)
- **Nights, Sundays, and holidays:** Emergency pharmacies (Notapotheke)

Prescription vs. Non-Prescription Medications

Prescription Medications (Rx)

You can only get these medications **with a prescription** from a doctor:

- **Antibiotics** (e.g., Amoxicillin, Ciprofloxacin)

- **Blood pressure medication** (e.g., Ramipril, Bisoprolol)
- **Antidepressants** (e.g., Sertraline, Citalopram)
- **Strong painkillers** (e.g., Tramadol, Tilidin)
- **Insulin** (for diabetics)
- **Birth control pills**
- **Sleep medications** (e.g., Zolpidem)

Non-Prescription Medications (OTC — Over The Counter)

You can buy these **without a prescription** — but only at a pharmacy:

- **Mild painkillers** (Ibuprofen, Paracetamol, Aspirin)
- **Cough syrup** and **nasal spray**
- **Stomach tablets** (Pantoprazol 20 mg, Omeprazol)
- **Allergy medication** (Cetirizine, Loratadine)
- **Wound creams** (Bepanthen)
- **Cold remedies** (Grippostad, Wick)
- **Vitamins** and minerals (some preparations)

Pharmacy-Only, But Not Prescription

Some medications are **pharmacy-only** — you don't need a prescription, but you can **only buy them at a pharmacy** (not in supermarkets):

- **Ibuprofen** (400 mg)
- **Paracetamol** (500 mg)
- **Nasal spray** with active ingredient (Xylometazoline)

Freely Available (Also in Supermarkets)

Only a few products can be sold **outside pharmacies**:

- Plasters and bandaging materials
- Some herbal teas (e.g., chamomile)
- Some lozenges
- Bath additives

Types of Prescriptions

Pink Prescription (Insurance Prescription)

- For **legally insured persons**
- Health insurance covers costs (you pay only the **copay**)
- **Valid for 28 days** after issuance — then it expires!
- Issued by doctor **electronically** (E-Rezept since 2024)

E-Prescription

Since 2024, the **E-Rezept** is standard in Germany:

- Doctor issues the prescription **digitally**
- You redeem it at the pharmacy with your **health card** (eGK)
- Or via the **E-Rezept app** (gematik)
- No paper prescription needed (exceptions possible)

Blue Prescription (Private Prescription)

- For **privately insured persons** or self-payers
- You pay the **full price** and submit the receipt to your insurance
- **Valid for 3 months**

Yellow Prescription (Controlled Substance Prescription)

- For **strong painkillers** and controlled substances (e.g., Morphine, Methylphenidate/Ritalin)
- Particularly strict regulations
- **Valid for 7 days**

Copay — What You Pay

As a legally insured person, you pay a **copay** per medication:

- **10% of the price**, minimum **5 €**, maximum **10 €** per package
- **Chronically ill**: Annual limit of **1% of gross income** (instead of 2%)
- **Children under 18**: No copay

Copay Exemption

If your copays exceed the **annual limit**:

- **2%** of gross family income (for all)
- **1%** for chronically ill
- You can request an **exemption** from your health insurance → no copay for the rest of the year

Which Medications Are Copay-Free?

Health insurances negotiate discounts with manufacturers. Some medications are **completely copay-free** — your pharmacist can recommend an equivalent medication without copay.

Emergency Pharmacy — 24/7 Help

When Do I Need the Emergency Pharmacy?

If you **urgently need a medication outside regular hours**:

- **At night** (after 20:00/22:00)
- **On Sundays and holidays**
- **Saturday afternoon** (from around 14:00)

How Do I Find the Emergency Pharmacy?

- 1. Online:** apothekenfinder.mobi (website and app)
- 2. Phone: 0800 00 22 833** (free, automatic message)
- 3. Notice:** Every closed pharmacy has a note with the nearest emergency pharmacy
- 4. App:** "Apothekenfinder" (free, shows nearest emergency pharmacy + navigation)

Emergency Service Fee

An **emergency service fee** is charged:

- **2.50 €** surcharge (covered by health insurance for prescription medications)
- For non-prescription medications: You pay the surcharge yourself

How Does the Emergency Service Work?

- You ring the **emergency bell** (next to the entrance door)
- The pharmacist opens a **window** or small opening
- You submit your prescription and receive the medication

- **Payment:** Cash or card (not all emergency pharmacies accept cards!)

Online Pharmacies

Germany also has **authorized online pharmacies** that deliver medications by mail:

- **Non-prescription:** Order like in a normal online store
- **Prescription:** Submit E-Rezept
- **Prices:** Often cheaper than local pharmacies (especially non-prescription)
- **Delivery time:** 1-3 business days

Recognize Legitimate Online Pharmacies

- **EU safety logo** — clickable, leads to DIMDI registry
- **Registration** with DIMDI (German Institute for Medical Documentation and Information)
- Known providers: DocMorris, Shop-Apotheke, medpex, Zur Rose

Warning: NEVER buy medications from unknown websites — counterfeits can be life-threatening!

Tips for Foreigners

1. Redeem prescriptions on time — Insurance prescriptions are only **valid for 28 days**

2. Medications from home: Bring important medications for the transition + medical report (in English/German)

3. Ask the pharmacist — for minor complaints, pharmacists can advise without a doctor visit

4. Request copay exemption — if you're chronically ill or have low income

5. Install the E-Rezept app — convenient and fast

6. Medication names: German brand names may differ — bring the **active ingredient name** (on package in small print)

--- As of: March 2026. All information without guarantee.