

WHAT IS THE AHFS PHARMACOLOGIC-THERAPEUTIC CLASSIFICATION® SYSTEM?

The AHFS Pharmacologic-Therapeutic Classification System is a method of grouping drugs with similar pharmacologic, therapeutic, and/or chemical characteristics in a 4-tier hierarchy associated with a numeric code consisting of 2 to 8 digits.

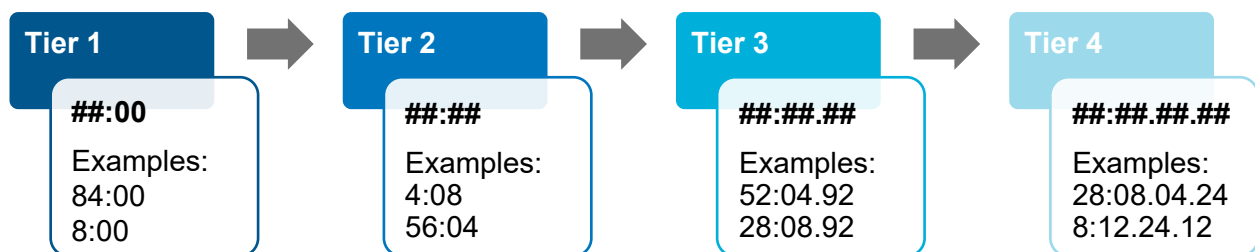
Developed and updated at least annually by the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists (ASHP), the system has been widely used in North America since its inception in 1959. For example, in hospitals, it facilitates decision-making about formulary inclusion and aggregate drug utilization reporting.



Drug assignments, re-assignments, new classifications, and class name changes are published on www.ashp.org.

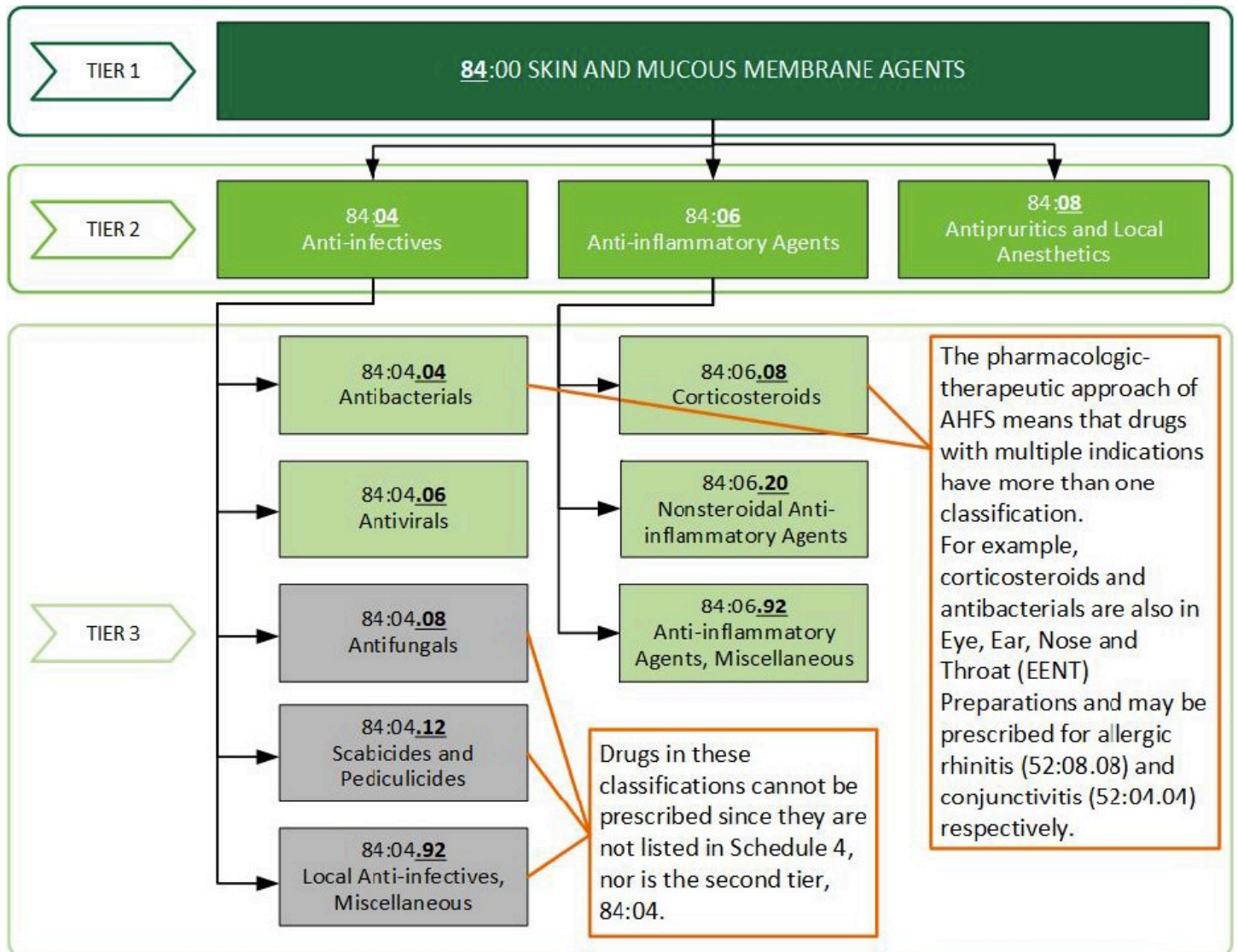
Drugs are assigned to the most specific tier of classification necessary to capture the **pharmacologic** characteristics of the drug(s) within that class.

- Up to 4 tiers (like subdivisions) in a hierarchy may be used to classify drugs at a more specific or detailed level.
- There may only be 1, 2 or 3 tiers – represented by 2, 4 or 6 digits, respectively – if deemed sufficient to capture their pharmacologic characteristics.



- A pharmacist may prescribe a drug within the AHFS classification listed in Column 2 of [Schedule 4 to O. Reg. 202/94](#) and any subsequent, more specific classifications, if those tiers exist.
- Prescribing authority **does not** include drugs from any preceding, broader tiers.

EXAMPLE: 84:00 Skin and Mucous Membrane Agents



Example: If the second-tier classification (**84:04, 84:06, 84:08**) is listed in Schedule 4 (Column 2), prescribing authority is inclusive of the subsequent, more specific third-tier classifications if they exist:

- For **84:06 Anti-inflammatory Agents**, this means prescribing authority also includes:
 - **84:06.08 Corticosteroids**
 - **84:06.20 Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Agents**
 - **84:06.92 Anti-inflammatory Agents, Miscellaneous**

Remember, prescribing authority does not include any preceding, broader tier(s):

- For **84:04.06 Antivirals**, this means prescribing authority does NOT include any drug in **84:04** or in **84:00**
 - Only a drug in the classification **84:04.06 Antivirals** can be prescribed

Pharmacists **must ensure** that the **approved indication and dosage form** of the drug product aligns with the minor ailment for which it is prescribed (Column 1).

Examples:

- Although diclofenac (**84:06.20** - Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Agents) is a more specific tier within the AHFS classification **84:06** - Skin and Mucous Membrane Agents - Anti-inflammatory Agents, it is not appropriate for treating any of the corresponding minor ailments and therefore cannot be prescribed.
- Similarly, crisaborole (**84:06.92** - Anti-inflammatory Agents, Miscellaneous) is a more specific tier within the AHFS classification **84:06** - Skin and Mucous Membrane Agents - Anti-inflammatory Agents, however it is only indicated for dermatitis, and could not be prescribed for impetigo, hemorrhoids, insect bites, etc.

Key Takeaway

A pharmacist may prescribe a drug that falls within the AHFS classification listed in Schedule 4 (Column 2) of the regulations (O. Reg. 202/94) and any subsequent, more specific tiers, if they exist. Prescribing authority does not include drugs from any preceding, broader tiers.

Example:

For musculoskeletal sprains and strains, since third-tier classification **28:08.04** is listed in **Schedule 4**, a pharmacist may prescribe a drug in any of the following **more specific fourth-tier** classifications:

- **28:08.04.08** Cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) Inhibitors
- **28:08.04.24** Salicylates
- **28:08.04.92** Other Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Agents



The AHFS system is NOT intended to be used as clinical information and does not provide a recommendation for use for a given indication. Deciding which drug to prescribe depends upon the pharmacist's assessment of the patient and clinical judgement, considering the best available evidence and suitable therapeutic references.

Key takeaway

The drug's indication must match the minor ailment being treated.

Example:

For candidal stomatitis (Column 1), a pharmacist may prescribe a drug in the AHFS Classification **8:14.28** Anti-infectives - Antifungals - Polyenes (Column 2). Amphotericin B and Nystatin are both “polyene anti-fungals”, however, only Nystatin is indicated for oral thrush and may be prescribed.