

NCL ICB Position statement on the prescribing of medicines available to purchase over the counter for self-limiting and minor health conditions

NHS North Central London Integrated Care Board (ICB) is committed to delivering best value to patients by ensuring that we use our resources well. Therefore, to help us to support the cost effective, evidence-based use of medicines, NCL ICB no longer supports the routine prescribing of probiotics, vitamins and minerals, and medicines that can be bought over the counter for self-limiting, short-term illnesses and minor conditions.

By managing minor health needs through self-care, it will help to ease the pressure on the NHS. Self-care means looking after yourself in a healthy way, whether it is brushing your teeth, taking medicine when you have hay fever or doing some exercise. Advice from organisations such as the [Self Care Forum](#) and [NHS.UK](#) is readily available on the internet.

Managing minor health needs through self-care is in line with the NHS England Guidance for ICBs (previously CCGs) '[Conditions for which over the counter medicines should not be routinely prescribed in primary care](#)'

Which medicines and conditions are included?

- Pharmacy Only (P) and General Sales Lists (GSL) treatments that can be purchased over the counter (OTC) from a pharmacy with or without advice.
- GSL treatments are medicines that can be purchased from a pharmacy and other retail outlets such as supermarkets, petrol stations, convenience, and discount stores. GSL treatments also include a patient information leaflet.
- Treatments that are used to treat a condition that is considered to be self-limiting and so does not need treatment as it will heal/resolve by itself; and/or
- Treatments that are used to treat a condition which lends itself to self-care, i.e. that the person suffering does not normally need to seek medical care and/or treatment for the condition.

The list of conditions includes those that:

- are considered to be self-limiting and so do not need treatment as they will heal or be cured of their own accord; or
- lend themselves to self-care i.e. the person suffering does not normally need to seek medical advice and can manage the condition by purchasing over the counter items directly.

There are also categories of items included:

- that can be purchased over the counter, sometimes at a lower cost than that which would be incurred by the NHS; or
- for which there is little evidence of clinical effectiveness

(Please see [NHS England 'Prescribing of over the counter medicines is changing' leaflet](#))

• Acute sore throat	• Infant colic	• Mouth ulcers
• Conjunctivitis	• Infrequent constipation	• Nappy rash
• Coughs and colds and nasal congestion	• Infrequent migraine	• Oral thrush
• Cradle cap (seborrhoeic dermatitis - infants)	• Infrequent cold sores of the lip	• Prevention of dental caries
• Dandruff	• Insect bites and stings	• Probiotics
• Diarrhoea (Adults)	• Mild acne	• Ringworm / athlete's foot
• Dry eyes/sore tired eyes	• Mild cystitis	• Sun protection
• Earwax	• Mild dry skin/sunburn	• Teething / mild toothache
• Excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis)	• Mild contact dermatitis	• Threadworms
• Haemorrhoids	• Mild to moderate hay fever/allergic rhinitis	• Travel sickness
• Head lice	• Minor burns and scalds	• Vitamins and minerals
• Indigestion and heartburn	• Minor conditions associated with pain, discomfort and/fever. (e.g. Aches and sprains, headache, period pain)	• Warts and Verrucae

General exceptions to the guidance

There are certain scenarios where patients should continue to have their treatments prescribed and these are outlined below:

- Patients prescribed an OTC treatment for a long-term condition (e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis or treatments for inflammatory bowel disease).
- For the treatment of more complex forms of minor illnesses (e.g. severe migraines that are unresponsive to over the counter medicines).
- For those patients that have symptoms that suggest the condition is not minor (i.e. those with red flag symptoms for example indigestion with very bad pain.)
- Treatment for complex patients (e.g. immunosuppressed patients).
- Patients prescribed OTC products to treat an adverse effect or symptom of a more complex illness and/or prescription only medications should continue to have these products prescribed on the NHS.
- Circumstances where the product licence does not allow the product to be sold over the counter to certain groups of patients. This may vary by medicine, but could include babies, children and/or women who are pregnant or breast-feeding. Community pharmacists will be aware of what these are and can advise accordingly.
- Patients with a minor condition suitable for self-care that has not responded sufficiently to treatment with an OTC product.
- Patients where the clinician considers that the presenting symptom is due to a condition that would not be considered a minor condition.

- Circumstances where the prescriber believes that in their clinical judgement, exceptional circumstances exist that warrant deviation from the recommendation to self-care.
- Individual patients where the clinician considers that their ability to self-manage is compromised as a consequence of medical, mental health or significant social vulnerability to the extent that their health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care. To note that being exempt from paying a prescription charge does not automatically warrant an exception to the guidance. Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues.

What are the benefits of going to the pharmacy instead of making an appointment to see your GP?

Pharmacists have the knowledge and skills to help with many healthcare conditions and you do not need an appointment to speak to a pharmacist. Visiting a pharmacist first helps to make more GP appointments available for people with more complex healthcare needs. If you have something more serious, the pharmacist is trained to signpost you quickly to the right medical care.

[NHS England's Pharmacy First Service](#) builds on existing pharmacy services that support many patients who present directly to the pharmacy, by offering advice, recommending OTC medicines that can be purchased for short term illnesses and self-limiting symptoms, or they can provide information about self-care. They may also be able to offer treatment and some prescription medicine for [some conditions](#), where clinically appropriate, without you needing to see a GP.

North Central London ICB has a [Self-Care Medicines Scheme](#) which enables eligible patients on low incomes in Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington who struggle to afford OTC medicines to obtain selected non-prescription medicines for free from local pharmacies for common minor ailments like allergies, earache or minor injuries.

What can you do?

The NHS recommends everyone keep a well-stocked medicine cabinet with self-care medicines. By keeping certain useful medicines at home, you can treat common conditions immediately and you will not need to see a GP. The medicines you may want to keep at home could include:

- A painkiller to help treat minor conditions associated with pain, discomfort, and fever.
- Indigestion medicines, oral rehydration salts and treatments for constipation and diarrhoea.
- Treatments for seasonal conditions such as colds and hay fever.
- Sunblock and after sun.
- Some basic first aid items would also be useful.

Make sure medicines in your cabinet are within their use-by date and kept in their original containers. If medicines are past their use-by date, do not use them. Such medicines can be taken to a pharmacy for safe disposal. Always keep medicines out of the reach and sight of children.

What if my child needs medicines while at school?

Write to the school giving permission for your child to take the medicine. Guidance from the Department of Education makes it clear that a child can take non-prescription self-care medicines with written permission from a parent or guardian. It is not necessary for GPs to write to schools to confirm that it is appropriate to administer self-care medicines.

The age at which children are ready to take their own medicines varies. As children grow and develop, they should be encouraged to participate in decisions about their medicines and take responsibility for their own medicines.

Comments and queries can be sent by email to: nclieb.enquiries@nhs.net
or go to our website <https://nclhealthandcare.org.uk/> for office address.