

Position Statement: Self-care for Hay Fever / Seasonal Rhinitis

As part of its self-care strategy, in line with [National Guidance](#), NHS Nottingham & Nottinghamshire ICB does not support the routine prescribing of antihistamines, nasal sprays and eye drops for the treatment of mild to moderate hay fever / seasonal rhinitis– see below for exceptions.

Patients should be advised to purchase these products over the counter (OTC).

Recommendations:

- All patients currently prescribed treatment for mild to moderate hay fever / seasonal rhinitis should be reviewed with a view to stopping prescribing and recommending an OTC product for self-care.
- Prescribers should advise patients on safe and effective self-care measures, directing them to appropriate sources of information and patient information leaflets (e.g. [The NHS Website](#), [Notts APC Hay Fever Self Care Leaflet](#) and [The Self Care Forum](#)).
- See [Notts APC Allergic Rhinoconjunctivitis Treatment Pathway \(adults\)](#) for prescribing advice and more information on self-care.
- Patients can seek advice directly with the Community Pharmacist or via referral from the GP Surgery using the minor illness self-care advice and over the counter sales part of Pharmacy First. The advantage of the Pharmacy First referral is that the outcome of the consultation is sent to the GP surgery so that this can be included in the GP patient record.

Consider prescribing if:

- The patient meets one or more of the general exception criteria ([appendix 1](#)) including prescribing for those 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 the patient's health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care. Being exempt from paying a prescription charge does not automatically warrant an exception to the guidance. Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues.
- There are some restrictions to OTC sales, for example there may be restrictions regarding pregnancy, breastfeeding and age so an NHS prescription may be needed in some circumstances.
- Allergic symptoms are severe and have not responded to various OTC medication or trigger avoidance – see [APC guidance](#).
- There is a licensing restriction on the sale of OTC medication. Most restrictions can be checked using the summary of product characteristics, available at www.medicines.org.uk.
- The patient has chronic symptoms which require treatment throughout the year.

Rationale:

The [National Guidance](#) recommends that prescriptions to treat mild to moderate hay fever / seasonal rhinitis should not be routinely offered as the condition is appropriate for self-care.

- Hay fever is a common allergic condition that affects up to one in five people.
- There's currently no cure for hay fever, but most people with mild to moderate symptoms can relieve symptoms with OTC treatments recommended by a pharmacist.
- The severity of symptoms can vary, some people need medication to manage their symptoms and others can manage their condition by avoiding triggers.

- OTC medications are usually cheaper than a prescription and can be purchased without seeing a GP.

Any patient queries or complaints should be directed to the Patient Experience Team on 0115 883 9570 or email nnicb-nn.patientexperience@nhs.net.

References

NHS England, NHS Clinical Commissioners. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in Primary Care:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/policy-guidance-conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed-in-primary-care/> (accessed online March 2023)

Appendix 1 – General Exceptions to Self-Care

The following are scenarios where [NHSE guidance](#) states that patients should continue to have their treatments prescribed for those conditions where general exceptions apply:

- 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.
- 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 OTC 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 on prescription only treatments.
- 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 doesn't 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.