

Position statement on the prescribing of antihistamines and nasal sprays for mild to moderate hayfever on prescription

In line with NHS England's guidance on conditions for which over the counter items should not be routinely prescribed, SW London CCGs* do not support the routine prescribing of antihistamines and nasal sprays for mild to moderate hayfever on prescription except in the following circumstances:

- Allergic symptoms are severe and do not respond to various combinations of over the counter (OTC) medication
- OTC medication to manage allergic symptoms is not suitable for the patient
- Patient has perennial symptoms which require treatment throughout the year

Rationale

- Hayfever and other allergic symptoms can be managed by avoiding triggers or taking medication.^{1,2}
- If treatment is needed for mild to moderate hayfever, a wide range of medications can be purchased from community pharmacies and supermarkets. These medications are usually less expensive than a prescription and can be purchased without seeing a GP.¹
- If treatment throughout the year is required for perennial symptoms, these may still be available on prescription where appropriate.

References

1. PrescQIPP B84 Antihistamines and hayfever
<https://www.prescqipp.info/resources/category/143-self-care-hayfever>
2. NICE Clinical Knowledge Summaries Allergic Rhinitis (accessed 23/2/17)
<https://cks.nice.org.uk/allergic-rhinitis>
3. Beconase Hayfever patient information leaflet (accessed 23/2/17)
<http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/medicine/26797>
4. PrescQipp Self Care webkit <https://www.prescqipp.info/resources/category/141-self-care-webkit>

Further information is available:

NHS England. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-ccgs/> Updated 29th March 2018.

*SWL CCGs (NHS Croydon CCG, NHS Kingston CCG, NHS Merton CCG, NHS Richmond CCG and NHS Sutton CCG) position statement on prescribing of antihistamines and nasal sprays for hayfever

Guidance and recommendations for clinicians

- Advise patients about safe and effective self-care measures. You may wish to provide the patient with a 'non-prescription' sheet or a patient information leaflet to promote education about self-limiting conditions.
- Prescriptions may be considered in the following circumstances:
 - Allergic symptoms are severe and do not respond to various combinations of over the counter medication.
 - Over the counter medication to manage allergic symptoms is not suitable for the patient.
 - Patient has perennial symptoms which require treatment throughout the year.
- Advise patients to seek medical advice in the following circumstances:^{1,2}
 - If experiencing wheezing, breathlessness or tightness in their chest.
 - If pregnant or breastfeeding.
 - If hayfever symptoms are not relieved by OTC treatments in combination with measures to reduce exposure to pollen.
 - The pattern of symptoms seems unusual or diagnosis is uncertain.
 - An OTC corticosteroid nasal spray has been used for longer than 3 months.³

Guidance for patients, carer's and guardians

- Community pharmacists can offer advice on how to manage hayfever and other allergic symptoms, when to seek medical advice, and what to take if you are on other medication. You do not need to make an appointment to see the pharmacist and many pharmacies are open late nights and at the weekend when the doctor's surgery is closed.⁴
- Prescriptions may be considered in the following circumstances:
 - Allergic symptoms are severe and do not respond to various combinations of over the counter medication.
 - Over the counter medication to manage allergic symptoms is not suitable for the patient.
 - You have continuous symptoms which require treatment throughout the year.
- By keeping a selection of essential medications at home you can treat your allergic symptoms in a timely manner, and avoid unnecessary trips to see your doctor.⁴
- Medication can often be purchased cheaper than a prescription, from a community pharmacy or a supermarket. These include antihistamine tablets and syrup, and nasal sprays.^{1,4} Larger pack sizes of antihistamine tablets and less expensive generic versions of nasal sprays may also be available from your community pharmacy.

For further information see:

- Hayfever - includes information on symptoms, avoidance methods and overview of treatment options. <http://patient.info/health/hay-fever-leaflet>
- NHS Choices - includes information on symptoms, causes, diagnosis, treatment and prevention. <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- NHS Choices Live Well (hayfever) - includes information on hay fever in adults and children and hay fever and the weather. <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Hayfever/Pages/Hayfeverhome.aspx>
- NHS Choices Live Well (allergies) - includes information on living with allergies and common allergies and how to treat them, <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Allergies/Pages/Allergieshome.aspx>

The NHS belongs to YOU, use it responsibly