

Self Care Briefing for Clinicians: Cough, Colds and Nasal Congestion

Summary

Coughs, colds and nasal congestion are minor conditions that can be treated without the need for a GP consultation or prescription in the first instance. They can easily be treated with simple over-the-counter preparations like paracetamol and/or decongestants.

Recommendations for clinicians

- Provide the patient with a 'non-prescription' sheet or a patient information leaflet to promote education about minor conditions suitable for self care when appropriate.
- Advise patients of safe and effective self care measures:
 - Rest and drink plenty of fluid.
 - Gargle with salt water and steam inhalation.
 - Coughs will usually resolve within 21 days and colds within 14 days.
- Advise patients to seek medical attention and consider treatment with a prescription in the following circumstances:
 - Symptoms last for more than 3 weeks or suddenly worsen.
 - Cough up blood stained phlegm.
 - Difficulty in breathing.
 - Sharp pain in chest.
 - Side of neck feels swollen and painful (swollen glands).
 - Losing weight without reason.
 - Temperature is very high or feeling hot and shivery.
 - Concerned about a child's cold symptoms.
 - Have a weakened immune system e.g. on chemotherapy.

Examples of over-the-counter products available to buy

Please advise patients that suggested prices are, a guide, correct at the time of writing and are subject to change.

- Paracetamol, Ibuprofen: Not licensed for children under 3 months old (£0.25-£4.00 for 16 tablets/capsules, £4.00 for 100 ml oral liquid).
- Aspirin: Not licensed for children under 16 years old (£0.40-£3.00 for 16 tablets).
- Saline nose drops (£2.40-£5.00 for 10ml).
- Saline sprays (£7.99 for 100ml) (£3.50-£5.00 for 15ml).

Further information

- [Selfcare forum](#)
- [NHS.uk](#)
- [Patient UK](#)

Document History

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