

New prescription guidance:

Items freely available to buy over the counter from supermarkets and pharmacies

Your questions answered



Clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) are the organisations responsible for planning and buying most health services needed by a population. This includes paying for any prescriptions.

It is the responsibility of CCGs to spend their budget as wisely as possible, on behalf of the entire population, so that everyone can receive a reasonable level of care. As part of this, CCGs regularly review how the prescription budget is being spent and whether it is being used in the best way.

Leicester City CCG has developed some guidance for GPs, and other health professionals that are trained to be able to write prescriptions, to help them make decisions about whether patients should be given prescriptions for certain items.

We have produced this latest guidance to advise prescribers about the following types of products that are freely available to buy from supermarkets and pharmacies:

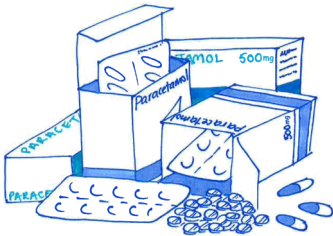
- Paracetamol for short-term minor illnesses
- Antifungal nail paint
- Cold sore treatments (applied to the skin)
- Cough and cold remedies
- Infantile colic remedies
- Lutein and antioxidant vitamins, omega 3 fatty acids and other fish oils
- Rubefacients (gels and creams for pain relief)

In June 2016, before producing the guidance, we launched a survey together with Healthwatch and our neighbouring CCGs in Leicestershire and Rutland, to ask patients for their views. Over 800 people completed the survey.

What the new guidance says:

Paracetamol

The guidance advises against prescribing paracetamol for short term illnesses, such as coughs and colds.



This does not apply to patients who use large volumes of paracetamol for the management of chronic pain and long term conditions or paracetamol combination products such as co-codamol 30/500.

Other products

Prescribers are advised not to prescribe medicines or products that can be bought over the counter and where there is low clinical evidence of benefit:

- Antifungal nail paint
- Cold sore treatments (applied to the skin)
- Cough and cold remedies
- Infantile colic remedies
- Lutein and antioxidant vitamins, omega 3 fatty acids and other fish oils



Paracetamol

Why are we asking you to buy paracetamol?

The NHS belongs to everybody and the CCGs must ensure that their resources are used in the best possible way for all patients. Paracetamol tablets and liquid can be bought easily and cheaply from pharmacies and supermarkets, for as little as 20p. It costs the NHS around four times as much to provide paracetamol on prescription as it does to buy it over the counter.

We are therefore asking patients not to request paracetamol on prescription from their GP, unless required for chronic pain management, and to purchase it instead. We think this way is a fair way of using resources wisely as. Results from a recent public survey shows that the vast majority of people agree.

Will this affect me if I take paracetamol regularly for pain management?

This won't affect you if you are taking paracetamol regularly as part of a chronic pain management plan or paracetamol with codeine (co-codamol) only available on prescription. In this case your GP will continue to prescribe these in the quantities appropriate for you.

What will happen if I have paracetamol on repeat prescription but I don't have a chronic pain problem?

Your GP may ask you to buy paracetamol if it is not required regularly. They may also remove it from your repeat prescription and only ask you to order it when you need it. You can help by letting your GP practice know if paracetamol is on your repeat prescription and you don't take it regularly.

Will this affect me if I have a pre-paid certificate?

If you have a pre-paid certificate you will also be asked to purchase your own paracetamol for common ailments. However, if you need regular paracetamol for management of chronic pain, then this will be covered by your pre-paid certificate.

Is paracetamol on prescription better quality than what you can buy?

No, this is not the case because all licensed medicines bought over the counter must go through detailed safety and quality tests. There should be no noticeable difference in the effect on pain or fever between paracetamol that you can buy and that the ones supplied on prescription.

What if I can't get to a shop easily to buy paracetamol when I am not feeling well?

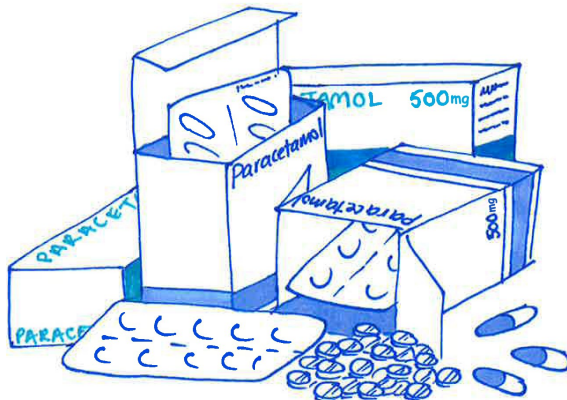
Be prepared by keeping some paracetamol in your medicines cabinet at home. It can be bought from pharmacies and many shops and supermarkets.

Who will be able to advise me on common ailments?

Pharmacists can recognise many common health complaints. They can give advice or, where appropriate, medicines that will help clear up the problem. If your problem is more serious and needs the attention of a GP, your pharmacist will recognise this and advise you to see your GP instead.

What's more, many pharmacies are open in the evenings and at the weekends.

Using your community pharmacist will save on GP appointment time and allow them to deal with more urgent problems.



Other medicines

What other medicines cannot now be prescribed?

The guidance applies to the following types of products:

- Antifungal nail paint
- Cold sore treatments (applied to the skin)
- Complementary therapies, herbal supplements and homeopathic medicines
- Cough, cold and sore throat remedies, including cough mixtures, aromatic inhalations, decongestants and sore throat lozenges
- Infantile colic remedies
- Glucosamine
- Vitamins to help with vision and antioxidant vitamins,
- omega 3 fatty acids and other fish oils
- Probiotics
- Multivitamin, vitamins and minerals
- Rubefaciants (gels and creams for pain relief)

Why are they no longer being prescribed?

The NHS belongs to everybody and the CCGs must ensure that their resources are used in the best possible way for all patients. There is limited clinical evidence that these products are effective. They can be easily purchased in pharmacies and supermarkets. Results from our recent public survey shows that the vast majority of people agree with this recommendation.

What will happen if I have any of these items on a repeat prescription?

Your GP may ask you to buy these and may also remove them from your repeat prescription. You can help by letting your GP practice know if any of these items are on your repeat prescription.

Will this affect me if I have a pre-paid certificate?

If you have a pre-paid certificate you will also be asked to purchase your own products.

What if I can't get to a shop easily to buy these items?

Be prepared by keeping products that you are likely to need in your medicines cabinet at home. They can be bought from pharmacies and many shops and supermarkets.

Who will be able to advise me on common ailments?

Pharmacists can recognise many common health complaints. They can give advice or, where appropriate, medicines that will help clear up the problem. If your problem is more serious and needs the attention of a GP, your pharmacist will recognise this and advise you to see your GP instead. What's more, many pharmacies are open in the evenings and at the weekends.

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