

Frequently Asked Questions

1.

Q. Why is the change being made?

A. The decision for East Berkshire follows a national consultation and NHS England guidance which recommends this change. As a commissioner (buyer) of services and treatments, we have a duty to plan and prioritise fairly and use the public money available to achieve the maximum health benefit for the people of East Berkshire.

Between April 2017 and March 2018, the prescribing cost for these medicines locally cost over £3.7 million which we think could be put to better use to support more serious health conditions.

Costs to the NHS are often higher than those over the counter when other fees are included such as those for dispensing or medical consultations.

The change will also help ease some of the pressure on GP appointments, so doctors and other healthcare professionals can concentrate on patients with more serious or long terms conditions.

2.

Q. Was the change compulsory? What would happen if you didn't make the change?

A. The change was not compulsory. However, CCGs across the country are implementing the change and this ensures that wherever you are registered the advice is the same.

If this change was not made then there would be less funding for other treatments and services locally, and we may not be able to provide some prescription only medications, some operations or introduce new services.

3.

Q. What happens if someone cannot afford to pay for the medication over the counter?

A. Many of the conditions on the list are conditions which will get better on their own without treatment or alternatively, the over the counter medication has not been shown to be effective. In these cases there will be no harm in not taking medication for your condition. You may be able to make some lifestyle changes that will help you feel better or simply take some time to rest.

4.

Q. What happens if I am already exempt from paying for my prescription?

A. The change applies to everyone, whether they pay the NHS prescription charge or get their NHS prescriptions for free.

5.

Q. My child is under 16 years old and normally gets their prescriptions free. How does this affect them?

A. The change applies to everyone, whether they pay the NHS prescription charge or get their NHS prescriptions for free.

6.

Q. Will there be any exceptions?

A. There are exceptions to the change which include:

- Over the counter products can be prescribed if they are treating a long term condition e.g. osteoarthritis.
- Pharmacists, nurses and doctors should be aware of red flag symptoms that may indicate that the condition is more serious and act appropriately in response to those symptoms.
- If an individual cannot be sold a product over the counter because of restrictions in the product license then a prescription may be considered.
- Where all over the counter options have been tried and are ineffective then a prescription only medicine may be considered.

- 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.

7.

Q. If you are no longer prescribing over-the-counter medicines, where can I get these medicines from?

A. All of these medications can be purchased from community pharmacies and some of them can be purchased from supermarkets or other shops. These often have long opening times so you can get your medicines quickly and treat your condition early, rather than having to wait for a GP appointment. This also saves valuable GP time and your own time too – it is much quicker to pop into your local pharmacy than wait for a GP appointment. Community pharmacists are experts who are best placed to give advice on the right product for you to use. You may find it helpful to keep a small supply of medicines at home for use, such as painkillers for headaches and remedies for colds and sore throats. The NHS Choices website also contains a lot of useful information on a range of minor ailments (such as constipation, short-term pain, strains and sprains), which you can manage yourself. Please visit www.nhs.uk. 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.

8.

Q. What do you mean by short-term conditions and minor ailments?

A. Short-term conditions tend to improve on their own without a long-term effect on a person's health. Minor ailments are uncomplicated conditions which can be diagnosed and managed without seeing the doctor. Some examples of these include: coughs, colds and sore throats; colic; threadworms; verrucas; warts; acne and indigestion.

9.

Q. What do you mean by over-the-counter medicines?

A. Over-the-counter (OTC) medicines can be bought directly without a prescription from a community pharmacy, supermarket or other shops. Some examples include: paracetamol and ibuprofen; antihistamines; and indigestion treatments.

10.

Q. I am being treated with these medicines for a long-term condition and taking them regularly, do I need to buy them?

A. People who need medicines for a long-term condition e.g. pain relief for osteoarthritis, will still be able to get them with a prescription. This policy only applies to the use of medicines and products for short-term conditions. Your GP will continue to prescribe items you need for your long-term condition.

11.

Q. I have been to my pharmacist to buy a particular type of medicine but they will not sell it to me. What do I do?

A. There are some circumstances when pharmacists might not sell you a medicine. For example, when a product is not licensed for sale for the ailment you have or for someone of your age; when a product is not appropriate for you, or could cause you harm. If this happens, please speak to your GP and if they think you still need the item or an alternative, they may issue you with a prescription at their clinical discretion.

12.

Q. What if over the counter options have been tried and are ineffective?

A. A prescription maybe considered. Speak to your pharmacist in the first instance who may recommend an alternative or may advise that you speak to your doctor.