

Position statement on the prescribing antiviral creams for infrequent cold sores in patients over 3 months

Following the NHS England guidance 'Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs' (March 2018) the following changes to prescribing have been agreed across Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.

From 16 March 2021
Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge Clinical Commissioning Groups (BHR CCGS) no longer supports the prescribing of antiviral creams for infrequent cold sores

Decision

The decision to stop antiviral creams for infrequent cold sores applies to ALL patients across Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge unless the patient fall into one of the exceptions listed below.

If symptoms are not improving or responding to treatment, then patients should be encouraged to seek further advice from a pharmacy, NHS app, NHS website or NHS 111. For care home patients: access to treatment should be considered via a care home policy.

Exceptions

BHR CCGs have agreed exceptions to this recommendation, where they accept that prescribing should continue in primary care for:

- Pregnancy or breastfeeding
- Immunocompromised patients
- Patients who exhibit 'red flag' symptoms should be referred or treated accordingly
- The clinician considers that the patient's ability to self-manage is compromised as a consequence of significant vulnerability to the extent that their health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care. Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues

This decision was made because:

- Cold sores caused by the herpes simplex virus usually clear up without treatment within 7 to 10 days
- If patients want to use antiviral creams they are available to purchase over the counter from pharmacies and if used correctly, these can help ease symptoms and speed up the healing time
- BHR CCGs have a duty to spend taxpayer's money wisely, to make sure they get the best value possible – especially when NHS funding is being severely squeezed and more patients are being seen with more complex health issues than ever before

References

1. NHS website: Cold sores- last reviewed: 20 July 2020. Page accessed 23 April 2021
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cold-sores/>
2. NHS England and NHS Clinical Commissioners. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs, March 2018. Publishing approval reference 07851 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-CCGs/>