

Medicines for dental conditions on FP10

This briefing focuses on the prescribing of medicines for dental conditions and provides the rationale for discontinuing their supply via General Practitioners (GPs) on FP10 prescriptions.

The NHS England (NHSE) Guidance “Conditions for which over the counter (OTC) items should not be routinely be prescribed in primary care” published in March 2018, makes specific recommendations regarding prescribing for dental conditions, where it may be more appropriate for self-care.¹

Key recommendations

- Dentists are usually best placed to assess dental problems and prescribe and monitor medicines to treat them.
- Dentists are usually able to prescribe or direct their patients to appropriate sources of medicines for dental conditions without involving the GP (e.g. self-care).
- GPs and practice staff should be aware of in hours and out of hours dental services available locally to manage urgent and emergency dental conditions,
- If a GP prescribes medicines for dental conditions, the GP is then responsible for both the prescribing and any consequent monitoring required, for which they may not be the most appropriate clinical practitioner.
- Involving GPs unnecessarily in prescribing medicines for dental conditions uses valuable appointments and GPs' time, which could be better utilised.
- GPs should discontinue the prescribing of dental products, and recommend patients purchase over the counter as self-care or visit their dentist for advice and prescribing, where appropriate.
- As with all prescribing interventions, individual patient circumstances need to be borne in mind. The current climate and its effect on capacity (e.g. COVID) may also need to be considered before undertaking any new projects.

Costs and savings

In England and Wales, the total annual spend on dental products is over £2.7 million (NHSBSA ISP June to August 2020). There may also be additional costs for prescribed items, such as antibiotics, which cannot be quantified using prescribing data. Discontinuing 80% of prescribing of these dental products on GP FP10 prescriptions (toothpastes, mouthwashes, fluoride preparations, mouth ulcer healing treatments etc.) could **release savings of almost £2.2 million nationally, per year.**

It is recognised that some of this figure is a shifting of cost from the CCG prescribing budget to the dental budget, which is still ultimately paid for by the NHS. Nonetheless, there is a sound rationale for avoiding unnecessary involvement of GPs in dental prescribing, from both a clinical and legal governance perspective and to ensure optimal use of GPs' time.

Background and national guidance

The number of patients seeking dental advice from GPs or using A&E for dental problems is increasing. The British Dental Association (BDA) estimates that this costs the NHS over £20 million per year, in appointment and prescribing costs.² A potential driver that may be pushing patients from dental services to GPs is possibly the NHS dental charge.³

The NHSE Guidance regarding OTC items sets out three specific areas relating to dental treatment where self-care is recommended:¹

• Prevention of dental caries

Dentists may advise on using higher-strength fluoride toothpaste if a patient is particularly at risk of tooth decay. Some higher fluoride toothpastes (~1500 ppm) and mouthwashes can be purchased over the counter. Others which are prescription only medicines will need to be prescribed by the dentist recommending the treatment (e.g. Duraphat®).

• Teething/mild toothache

Teething can be distressing for some babies, but there are ways to make it easier for them.¹

Non-medicinal treatments, such as teething rings or massaging the gums, are the first line choice of therapy. Teething gels often contain a mild local anaesthetic, which can help to numb any pain or discomfort caused by teething, however there is a lack of evidence to support their use. Lidocaine containing teething gels should only be used when non-medicinal treatments have failed to provide sufficient relief.⁴




If the baby is in pain (i.e. crying and irritable) or has a mild raised temperature (less than 38C), then paracetamol or ibuprofen suspension can be given. These can also be purchased over the counter as self-care.¹ Mild toothache in adults can also be treated with over the counter painkillers whilst awaiting a dental appointment for further investigation.¹

• Mouth ulcers

Mouth ulcers are common and can usually be managed at home, without seeing a dentist or GP. However, OTC treatment can help to reduce swelling and ease any discomfort.¹

References

1. 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. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/otc-guidance-for-ccgs.pdf>
2. British Dental Association. Press release: NHS dental charge increases covering cuts and undermining prevention. 11 March 2019. <https://bda.org/news-centre/press-releases/nhs-charges-increases-covering-cuts-and-undermining-prevention>
3. British Medical Association. Patients presenting with possible dental problems. Last updated 8th September 2020. <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/gp-practices/gp-service-provision/patients-presenting-with-dental-problems>
4. Medicines Health and Regulatory Agency (MHRA). Drug Safety Update. Oral lidocaine-containing products for infant teething: only to be available under the supervision of a pharmacist. 13th December 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/oral-lidocaine-containing-products-for-infant-teething-only-to-be-available-under-the-supervision-of-a-pharmacist>
5. NHS England Direct Commissioning Change Projects. Responsibility for prescribing between Primary & Secondary/Tertiary Care. EL (91) 127. 29th January 2018. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/responsibility-prescribing-between-primary-secondary-care-v2.pdf>
6. General Dental Council. Guidance on prescribing medicines. 30th September 2013. https://www.gdc-uk.org/docs/default-source/guidance-documents/guidance-on-prescribing-medicines.pdf?sfvrsn=2e82e39c_2
7. United Kingdom Medicines Information (UKMI) – NHS Specialist Pharmacy Services. When and how can dentists supply medicines? October 2019. <https://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/when-and-how-can-dentists-supply-medicines/>

Additional resources available	 Bulletin	https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-263-dental-products-on-fp10/
	 Tools	https://data.prescqipp.info/#/views/SelfCareDynamicInfographicsDental/Introduction?:iid=1
	 Data pack	https://data.prescqipp.info/views/B263_DentalProductsonFP10/FrontPage?:iid=1&isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&embed=y

Support with any queries or comments related to the content of this document is available through the PrescQIPP help centre <https://help.prescqipp.info>

This document represents the view of PrescQIPP CIC at the time of publication, which was arrived at after careful consideration of the referenced evidence, and in accordance with PrescQIPP's quality assurance framework.

The use and application of this guidance does not override the individual responsibility of health and social care professionals to make decisions appropriate to local need and the circumstances of individual patients (in consultation with the patient and/or guardian or carer). [Terms and conditions](#)