

Over the counter (OTC) medicines in nurseries and schools

In November 2016, NHS Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group, implemented a self-care policy for minor health problems, which says that patients should access advice and purchase such homely remedies as they and their family need rather than being prescribed by their GP or other clinicians. This policy was updated last August 2018 following national guidance and can be found at; https://www.wirralccg.nhs.uk/media/5131/final_selfcarepolicyv3aug18.pdf

To support the continued implementation of this policy, Wirral CCG would like to clarify the interpretation around the current guidance around use of medicines in nurseries and schools.

Nurseries

Childcare providers sometimes ask parents to obtain prescriptions for over the counter medication such as paracetamol before they will administer to the children in their care.

In April 2017, the Department for Education produced the following guidance – *“Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five”*.

https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2017/03/eyfs_statutory_framework_2017.pdf

Page 27 of this guidance relates to medicines, in particular, the two paragraphs 3.45 and 3.46. The relevant sentences are underlined below.

3.45. Providers must have and implement a policy, and procedures, for administering medicines. It must include systems for obtaining information about a child’s needs for medicines, and for keeping this information up-to-date. Training must be provided for staff where the administration of medicine requires medical or technical knowledge. Prescription medicines must not be administered unless they have been prescribed for a child by a doctor, dentist, nurse or pharmacist (medicines containing aspirin should only be given if prescribed by a doctor).

This relates to medicines that must be prescribed, not over the counter medicines (paragraph 3.46 makes clear that there are prescription and non-prescription medicines). GPs and other prescribers should not therefore be required to prescribe over the counter medicines (see also 3.46).

3.46. Medicine (both prescription and non-prescription) must only be administered to a child where written permission for that particular medicine has been obtained from the child's parent and/or carer. Providers must keep a written record each time a medicine is administered to a child, and inform the child's parents and/or carers on the same day, or as soon as reasonably practicable.

This is clear that administration of non-prescription medicines (over the counter medicines) can be administered following written permission by the child's parent and/or carer. GPs and other prescribers should not be required to write to confirm that it is appropriate to administer over the counter medicines – parents can provide this consent.

Schools

In December 2015 (last updated August 2017), the Department for Education produced the following guidance –

“Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions. Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies in England”.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/638267/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions.pdf

This guidance includes the following statements relating to medicines, and the relevant sentences are underlined below:

“Wherever possible, children should be allowed to carry their own medicines and relevant devices or should be able to access their medicines for self-medication quickly and easily. Children who can take their medicines themselves or manage procedures may require an appropriate level of supervision. If it is not appropriate for a child to self-manage, relevant staff should help to administer medicines and manage procedures for them.

This highlights that children should be allowed to self-medicate wherever possible

“No child under 16 should be given prescription or non-prescription medicines without their parent’s written consent – except in exceptional circumstances where the medicine has been prescribed to the child without the knowledge of the parents. In such cases, every effort should be made to encourage the child or young person to involve their parents while respecting their right to confidentiality. Schools should set out the circumstances in which non-prescription medicines may be administered.

This is clear that non-prescription medicines (over the counter medicines) can be administered following written permission by the child’s parent. GPs and other prescribers should not be required to write to confirm that it is appropriate to administer over the counter medicines – parents can provide this consent.

“Schools should only accept prescribed medicines if these are in-date, labelled, provided in the original container as dispensed by a pharmacist and include instructions for administration, dosage and storage. The exception to this is insulin, which must still be in date, but will generally be available to schools inside an insulin pen or a pump, rather than in its original container.

This relates to where prescribed medicines are managed by the school, not over the counter medicines (the paragraph above makes clear that there are prescription and non-prescription medicines). GPs and other prescribers should not therefore be required to prescribe over the counter medicines.