

## Prescribing and Clinical Effectiveness Bulletin

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### PRESCRIBING GUIDANCE FOR HAY FEVER: SPRING / SUMMER 2010

#### PACEF Recommendations

Recommended medicines remain the same as in recent years:

**Non-sedating antihistamines:** generic cetirizine 10mg or generic loratadine 10mg tablets  
**Intra-nasal steroid:** beclometasone aqueous nasal spray 50mcg, 200dose (N.B. prescribing Beconase aqueous nasal spray 50mcg, 200 dose offers a cost saving to the NHS)  
**Anti-allergy eye-drops:** generic sodium cromoglicate 2% eye-drops 13.5ml

- Prescribers are encouraged to utilize either generic loratadine 10mg tablets or generic cetirizine 10mg tablets as their first line non-sedating antihistamines of choice. Wherever possible, patients who have historically taken desloratadine, levocetirizine, fexofenadine or mizolastine should be reviewed and changed to either generic loratadine or cetirizine for the Spring/Summer 2010 hay fever season.
- Prescribers are encouraged to use beclometasone aqueous nasal spray (generic, Beconase or Nasobec) as their first line intra-nasal steroid of choice. Wherever possible, patients who have historically used more expensive intra-nasal steroid formulations should be reviewed and changed to beclometasone aqueous nasal spray for the Spring/Summer 2010 hay fever season.
- Hay fever sufferers who are not exempt from prescription charges can purchase all the above items through pharmacies at a lower cost than the current prescription charge.
- Grazax (standard Timothy grass pollen allergen) is designated RED-RED and should not be prescribed by GPs.
- Depot steroids should not be prescribed for hay fever. Evidence of safety is lacking, and there is a significant risk of side-effects which cannot be mitigated by withdrawal of the drug. These risks include suppression of the HPA axis, osteoporosis, menstrual irregularity, glucose intolerance, increased susceptibility to infection and serious unpredictable events such as avascular necrosis of the head of femur.
- To cover important events (such as impending exams, weddings etc) where standard therapy is insufficient or has yet to reach full effect, a short course of oral steroids may be considered. Oral steroids should be used at the lowest effective dose for the shortest period possible and in combination with a topical nasal corticosteroid. A typical regimen for adults is prednisolone 0.5mg/kg (e.g. 20-40mg) orally in the morning with food for 5 to 10 days.

## Hayfever medicines offering poor value for money to the NHS

### Antihistamines

There are a wide range of hayfever medicines that offer poor value for money to the NHS and are not recommended for use in Lincolnshire. Of particular concern are **desloratadine (Neoclarityn)** and **levocetirizine (Xyzal)**, a major metabolite and a stereo isomer respectively of the originator brand products, loratadine (Clarityn) and cetirizine (Zirtek).

**Desloratadine** is the major metabolite of loratadine. Both loratadine and desloratadine have antihistaminic activity. Loratadine has a half-life of 8.4 hours; desloratadine has a half-life of 28 hours. There are no head-to-head randomized controlled trials of the two drugs, but, bearing in mind that desloratadine is given at half the dose compared to loratadine, the two drugs appear to be sufficiently similar to interchange. Schering-Plough (the original manufacturer) discontinued loratadine before patent expiry resulting in switching from loratadine to desloratadine; switching back from desloratadine to loratadine is recommended.

**Levocetirizine** is the active enantiomer of cetirizine. Cetirizine is a racemate (i.e an equal mixture of left and right handed enantiomers of a chiral molecule). As such, the pharmacological activity of levocetirizine at half the dose would be expected to be comparable to that of cetirizine. Switching from levocetirizine to cetirizine is also recommended.

Other higher cost non-sedating antihistamines such as **fexofenadine (Telfast)** and **mizolastine (Mizollen)** are considered to be equally poor value for money.

### Cost Comparison: Non-sedating antihistamines

	Cost for 30 days
<b>Loratadine 10mg tablets</b>	<b>£1.27</b>
<b>Cetirizine 10mg tablets</b>	<b>£1.02</b>
Cetirizine (Zirtek Allergy) 10mg tablets	£8.12
Desloratadine (Neoclarityn) 5mg tablets	£6.77
Desloratadine (Neoclarityn) 5mg orodispersible tablets	£6.90
Fexofenadine 120mg tablets	£4.15
Mizolastine (Mizollen) 10mg MR tablets	£5.77
Levocetirizine 5mg tablets	£4.39
	Cost per pack
Levocetirizine (Xyzal) 500 mcg/ml solution (200ml)	£6.00
Loratadine 5mg/5ml syrup (100ml)	£2.87
<b>Cetirizine 5mg/5ml soln (200ml)</b>	<b>£2.35</b>
Desloratadine (Neoclarityn) 2.5mg/5ml oral soln (150ml)	£10.15

(Preferred agents are highlighted in bold)

### PACEF Recommendation

**Prescribers are encouraged to utilize either generic loratadine 10mg tablets or generic cetirizine 10mg tablets as their first line non-sedating antihistamines of choice. Wherever possible, patients who have historically taken desloratadine, levocetirizine, fexofenadine or mizolastine should be reviewed and changed to either generic loratadine or cetirizine for the Spring/Summer 2010 hay fever season.**

### Intranasal steroid sprays

**Flunisolide (Syntaris), fluticasone propionate (Flixonase, Nasofan), fluticasone furoate (Avamys), mometasone furoate (Nasonex), triamcinolone acetonide (Nasacort)** all offer poor value for money when compared to beclometasone/Beconase Aqueous Nasal Spray and budesonide nasal spray. The claimed advantages of reduced systemic activity of mometasone furoate and fluticasone furoate even if true are probably of little relevance to short term (no more than 3 months) use in hay fever. Once-daily dosing is licensed for beclometasone / Beconase Aqueous Nasal Spray, for maintenance, once control of symptoms is achieved. Budesonide nasal spray is licensed for once daily use.

**Cost Comparison: Intra-nasal steroids**

	Unit cost	No of doses
<b>Beclometasone aqueous nasal spray 50mcg 200 dose</b>	<b>£3.05</b>	<b>200</b>
Beclometasone aqueous nasal spray 50mcg 180 dose (Beconase Hay Fever)	£5.54	180
<b>Beclometasone (Beconase) aqueous nasal spray 50 mcg 200 dose</b>	<b>£2.19</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Beclometasone (Nasobec) aqueous nasal spray 50mcg</b>	<b>£2.43</b>	<b>200</b>
Budesonide (Rhinocort Aqua 64) 64 mcg / spray	£2.49	120
Flunisolide (Syntaris) aqueous nasal spray 25mcg / spray	£5.05	240
Fluticasone propionate (Flixonase) 50mcg / spray	£11.01	150
Fluticasone furoate (Avamys) 27.5mcg / spray	£6.44	120
Fluticasone propionate (Nasofan) 50mcg /spray	£8.41	150
Triamcinolone (Nasacort) 55 mcg/spray	£7.39	120
Mometasone (Nasonex) 50mcg/spray	£7.68	140

(Preferred agents are highlighted in bold)

**PACEF Recommendation:**

**Prescribers are encouraged to use beclometasone aqueous nasal spray (generic, Beconase or Nasobec) as their first line intra-nasal steroid of choice. Wherever possible, patients who have historically used more expensive intra-nasal steroid formulations (see cost comparison table above) should be reviewed and changed to beclometasone aqueous nasal spray for the Spring/Summer 2010 hay fever season.**

**Anti-allergy Eye Drops**

**Prescribers should limit prescribing to sodium cromoglicate eye drops or Otrivine-Antistin eye drops.** Sodium cromoglicate eye drops offer cost-effective, safe relief of ocular symptoms for the majority of hay fever sufferers requiring eye drops. Otrivine-Antistin (antazoline/xylometazoline) eye drops are a suitable low cost alternative for those requiring occasional ocular symptom relief. Nedocromil sodium (Rapitol) eye drops have the potential to reduce dosing to twice-daily and may rarely be appropriate for hay fever sufferers wishing to use eye-drops for persistent daily ocular symptoms. Eye-drops are generally unpopular particularly if prescribed for regular daily use, and most individuals would prefer alternative treatments.

**Anti-allergy eye drops**

Trade name	Generic name	size	Unit cost
-	<b>Sodium cromoglicate 2%</b>	<b>13.5ml</b>	<b>£1.97</b>
<b>Otrivine-Antistin</b>	<b>Xylometazoline HCl 0.05%/ antazoline sulphate 0.5%</b>	<b>10ml</b>	<b>£2.35</b>
Rapitol	Nedocromil 2%	5ml	£4.92

Zaditen	Ketotifen 0.25mg/ml	5ml	£9.75
Alomide	Lodoxamide 0.1%	10ml	£5.31
Emadine	Emedastine 0.5mg/ml	5ml	£7.45
Hay-Crom	Sodium cromoglicate 2%	13.5ml	£1.61
Opatanol	Olopatadine 0.1%	5ml	£3.98
Opticrom	Sodium cromoglicate 2%	13.5ml	£8.03
Optilast	Azelastine 0.05%	8ml	£6.40
Relestat	Epinastine 0.5mg/ml	5ml	£9.90
Vividrin	Sodium cromoglicate 2%	13.5ml	£10.95

(Preferred agents are highlighted in bold)

### **Hay fever medicines available without prescription**

Most of the recommended hay fever medicines are available without prescription:

- Cetirizine and loratadine are available in packs of 7 for self-selection in pharmacies or other retailers. The generic versions are typically £1.00 to £1.50, but may be subject to offers such as three packs for the price of two. Brands are more expensive.
- Cetirizine and loratadine are also available in packs of 30, but only through pharmacies at the medicines counter. Generic versions may be between £2 and £4; offers may also be available.
- Beclometasone Aqueous Nasal Spray 200 dose is available through pharmacies at the medicines counter for £3 to £4. The branded Beconase versions are not good value at £6.06 for the 100 dose version and £9.09 for the 180 dose version.
- Sodium Cromoglicate 2% Eye Drops are available at the medicines counter at pharmacies and are typically available in 5ml, 10ml and 13.5ml sizes in prices from £3 to £5. Generic or 'own-label' versions are likely to be the least expensive.

#### **PACEF Recommendation:**

**Hay fever sufferers who are not exempt from prescription charges may find that they can purchase their prescribed items more cheaply from a community pharmacy.**

#### **Grazax**

Grazax (a once daily fast melting sublingual tablet containing standardized allergen extract of Timothy grass pollen) has been designated RED-RED by PACEF. Standard advice is as follows:

#### **PACEF Recommendation:**

**PACEF remain unconvinced of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of Grazax in comparison to lower cost alternatives such as subcutaneous therapy. As a result of this, Grazax remains RED-RED. It is recognized that there may be a limited role for the agent in adults (aged 18 to 65) who have not responded to optimal doses of conventional treatment for seasonal rhinitis and conjunctivitis and who are deemed unsuitable for subcutaneous therapy. Such patients must have a positive skin prick test or IgE test for grass pollen, specifically Timothy grass. In these circumstances, a specialist wishing to initiate therapy will need to first gain approval from the Lincolnshire Exceptional Cases Committee (LECC). If the LEC approve Grazax for use in a specific patient, this will be subject to specialist initiation and appropriate shared care arrangements.**

#### **Cost Comparison and Advice Summary**

Recommended	Dose	Price (Mar)	Do NOT prescribe as:
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<b>antihistamines</b>		<b>10)</b>	
<b>Cetirizine tablets 10mg, 30 tablets</b>	1 tablet daily	£1.02 (30)	Zirtek Allergy or any brand
<b>Cetirizine oral solution 5mg/5ml, 200ml</b>	5ml daily for children 2-6 years (Children over six: 10ml daily)	£2.35 (200ml)	
<b>Loratadine 10mg tablets, 30 tablets</b>	1 tablet daily	£1.27 (30)	

<b>Recommended intra-nasal steroids</b>			
<b>Beconase Aqueous Nasal Spray 50mcg 200dose</b>	Adults & children over 6: Two sprays in each nostril twice daily (2x2x2). Reduce to the minimum dose which controls symptoms (which may be once daily)	£2.19 (200 dose unit)	Beconase Hayfever Beconase Hayfever Relief Beconase 100 dose Beconase 180 dose Any other brand of beclometasone nasal spray
<b>Beclometasone Aqueous Nasal Spray 200 dose</b>	Adults & children over 6: Two sprays in each nostril twice daily (2x2x2). Reduce to the minimum dose which controls symptoms (which may be once daily)	£3.05 (200 dose unit)	Beclometasone Aqueous Nasal Spray 100 dose Beclometasone Aqueous Nasal Spray 180 dose

<b>Recommended anti-allergy eye-drops</b>			
<b>Sodium Cromoglicate 2% Eye Drops 13.5ml</b>	Adult & child: 1 or 2 drops in each eye four times daily	£1.97 (13.5ml)	Sodium Cromoglicate 2% Eye Drops 10ml Opticrom, Hay-Crom, Vividrin or any brand

<b>Second-line agents</b>			
Budesonide 64mcg metered pump nasal spray 120 dose	Adult and children over 12: Two sprays in each nostril once daily. Maintenance 1 spray in each nostril once daily. Max duration of treatment 3 months	£2.49 (120 dose unit)	
Otrivine-Antistin (antazoline sulphate 0.5%, xylometazoline hcl 0.05%) 10ml	Adults and children over 12 apply 2-3 times daily (max 7 days)	£2.35 (10ml)	

#### **References**

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 'Oral antihistamines for allergic disorders', *DTB* 2002; 40(8): 59 – 62  
 'Grass pollen allergy extract', *UKMI New Medicines Profile*, issue number 07/01, February 2007  
*PACE Bulletin*, Volume 2, No1, January 2008  
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*UKMI Q&A* Is there a place in therapy for Kenalog (triamcinolone acetonide) intramuscular injection for seasonal allergic rhinitis (hay fever)? (June 2008)  
 Prices from *Drug Tariff*, March 2010 and [www.cddata.co.uk](http://www.cddata.co.uk) March 2010.

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