

Hay fever

This information sheet explains some changes to how you can obtain treatments to relieve the symptoms of hay fever. These changes have been made by Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (HWE ICB), the NHS organisation that plans and pays for health services in Hertfordshire and West Essex and is supported by NHS England.

What is hay fever and what causes it?

Hay fever (also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis) is a common condition which affects around 1 in 5 people in the UK and usually occurs during the spring or summer. It is caused when the body overreacts to substances (allergens) such as pollen from grass or flowers. This leads to symptoms such as sneezing, itchy eyes, runny or a blocked nose, itchy throat, and fatigue.



The severity of symptoms can vary from person to person; some can manage their condition by avoiding triggers and others may need medication to manage their symptoms, such as steroid nose sprays, antihistamine tablets and eye drops. Symptoms often lessen over the years. Some people suffer symptoms all year round; this is called perennial allergic rhinitis.

General advice to avoid triggers?

- Keep house and car windows closed, especially when the pollen counts are high (early morning between 7am to 9am and evenings between 5pm and 7pm).
- Avoid large grassy areas, woodland, cutting the grass, pollutants, and car fumes.
- Wear wrap-around sunglasses.
- When you return home from outside wash your hands, face, hair, rinse your eyes and change your clothes.
- If possible, stay indoors when the pollen count is high.
- Use petroleum jelly inside your nose to block inhalation of pollen.
- Keep your house clean and wear a mask and glasses when doing housework.
- Don't dry washing outside to avoid pollen sticking to your clothes.
- Consider buying a pollen filter for the air vents in the car.

What changes have been made and how will this affect me?

HWE ICB is no longer funding prescriptions on the local NHS for products that treat short-term hay fever symptoms.

If you are experiencing common seasonal hay fever symptoms, you should no longer go to your GP to get a prescription. Instead, you should seek support from a pharmacist and/or buy over the counter (OTC) medication to treat your symptoms from a local pharmacy or supermarket.

Your local pharmacists are qualified to provide safe medical advice. They will be able to advise you on the most appropriate treatment for your symptoms and can also suggest other non-medicated ways of controlling your condition. They will also be able to advise when you do actually need to see a doctor for your symptoms. You can also visit: www.nhs.uk/conditions/hay-fever.

You should see your GP if you experience wheezing, breathlessness / tightness in the chest, are pregnant / breastfeeding, or if your symptoms are not relieved by OTC treatments in combination with measures to reduce your exposure to pollen.

Why has this change been made?

The local NHS is under pressure to make sure resources are shared fairly amongst the local population. This is a difficult balance to achieve, but there is a wide range of OTC medicines available to treat hay fever in pharmacies and supermarkets, which makes them readily accessible for patients to purchase without needing to see a GP. These medicines are often cheaper than medicines on prescription.