

Standard operating procedure for Pharmacy First referrals

Purpose

To outline the procedure for GP practice staff to refer eligible patients to community pharmacies under the NHS Pharmacy First Scheme for specified minor conditions, supporting faster access to care and reducing GP workload.

Scope

This SOP applies to all clinical and administrative staff involved in triaging, assessing, or managing patients eligible for Pharmacy First referral.

Background

The **Pharmacy First Service** allows community pharmacists to assess and treat patients for selected minor conditions without the need for a GP appointment. This improves access and relieves pressure on general practice and other NHS services.

Eligible Conditions

As of [2024/2025 update], patients may be referred for the following conditions:

- Acute otitis media (1–17 years)
- Impetigo (≥1 year)
- Infected insect bites (≥1 year)
- Shingles (≥18 years)
- Sinusitis (≥12 years)
- Sore throat (≥5 years)
- Uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women (16–64 years female only)
- Eye infections (>2 years)

Roles and Responsibilities

- **Reception/Administrative Staff**
 - Use care navigation protocols to identify suitable patients.
 - Offer referral to Pharmacy First and obtain verbal consent.
 - Document and code the referral offer and outcome in the patient record.
- **GPs/Clinicians**
 - Direct eligible patients to a pharmacy for treatment if presenting during consultation.
 - Ensure urgent or complex cases are not inappropriately referred.

- **Other practice staff**
 - Identify eligible patients and refer accordingly.
 - Provide patient education on the scheme.

Referral Process

1. **Triage or Consultation**
 - Identify eligible patient based on age, symptoms, and condition.
 - Check for red flags or exclusions (e.g., immunocompromised, recurrent infections).
 - Confirm patient is willing to attend a pharmacy.
2. **Record in Patient Record**
 - Note condition, discussion, consent, and referral action.
 - Use template /coded entry (e.g., "Pharmacy First referral made").
3. **Referral via Digital Platform**
 - Refer via AccuRx completing all required information
 - Provide pharmacy name, and inform the patient.
4. **Follow-up (if required)**
 - Pharmacist may refer back to the practice if the condition is unsuitable.
 - The patient can be directed to the reception desk if the condition requires same day attention, alternatively the pharmacist will advise the patient to contact the practice via E-consult or telephone for a next day appointment.
 - Document any return referrals and actions taken.

After 17:30 or Out-of-Hours

If a patient attends and is seen at a community pharmacy **after 17:30**, and is found to require **non-urgent medical attention**, the following steps apply:

- The **pharmacist will advise the patient to contact the GP practice in the usual way on the next working day.**
- If the patient is seen **after 17:30 and the GP practice is not open the following day** (e.g., weekends or bank holidays), the **pharmacy will advise the patient to contact NHS 111** for further support or triage.

This ensures that patients are not left without clear instructions and that clinical responsibility is appropriately managed during out-of-hours periods.