

Over-the-counter medicines (including the use of salbutamol and adrenaline) in schools guidance

This document is a summary of national (Department for Education, Department of Health, NHS England) guidance on the use of over-the-counter medicines, salbutamol inhalers and adrenaline auto-injectors in schools.

1. Medication that can be purchased over-the-counter without a prescription
2. Guidance on reliever inhalers for asthma
3. Guidance for adrenaline auto-injectors

Key Points

The Department of Education documents, [Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions](#) and [Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage](#) explains the legislative requirements and good practice guidance on supplying medicines in schools.

Prescription Only Medicine (POM) may not be administered in a school or early years setting unless they have been prescribed for a child by an 'Appropriate Practitioner', e.g. doctor, dentist, nurse or pharmacist.

However, medicines that can be bought over-the-counter (non-prescription) do **not** need an appropriate practitioner's prescription in order for a school or early years setting to give them. They also do **not** need additional pharmacy labels in order to be administered.

Medicine (both prescription and non-prescription) must only be administered to a child under 16 where written permission for that particular medicine has been obtained from the child's parent or carer.

From 1st October 2014, legislation on prescription only medicines changed to allow schools to buy salbutamol inhalers, without a prescription, for use in emergencies.

From 1st October 2017, legislation on prescription only medicines changed to allow schools to buy adrenaline auto-injector (AAI) devices, without a prescription, for use in emergencies.

Two AAIs should be prescribed per patient and the patient should be advised to carry them both with them at all times.

1. Medication that can be purchased over-the-counter (OTC) without a prescription

NHS England published the document [Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs](#) in 2018. This guidance outlines 35 conditions for which routine prescribing of OTC medicines is not recommended.

Non-prescription (OTC) medication does **not** need a GP signature / authorisation in order for a school, nursery or child-minder to give it. This is reflected in the Department for Education (DfE) [Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage](#)

Guidance and the DfE [Supporting Pupils at School with Medical Conditions](#) guidance. These guidance documents are relevant to child minders as well as nurseries and schools.

2. Guidance on salbutamol inhalers

From 1st October 2014, legislation changed to allow schools to purchase salbutamol inhalers, without a prescription, for use in emergencies. This change applies to all primary and secondary schools in the UK.

The emergency salbutamol inhaler should only be used by children for whom written parental consent for use of the emergency inhaler has been given, who have either been diagnosed with asthma and prescribed an inhaler, or who have been prescribed an inhaler as reliever medication and where this is recorded in the child's individual healthcare plan. The inhaler can be used if the pupil's prescribed inhaler is not available (e.g. because it is broken, empty or out-of-date).

Schools are not required to hold an inhaler – this is a discretionary power enabling schools to do this if they wish. Schools that choose to keep emergency inhalers (and spacers) should establish a protocol for their use, which should include infection control and cleaning to avoid cross infection. Schools should consider including a cross-reference to this protocol in their medicines policy.

Salbutamol is still classified as a POM; this legislation change only affects the way this medicine can be obtained and not the class of the medicine. Schools can be advised to contact a local community pharmacy for advice on inhaler technique and recommended spacer device, as well as obtaining further supplies.

Schools can inhalers and spacers from a pharmaceutical supplier, such as a local pharmacy. The pharmaceutical supplier will need a request signed by the principal or head teacher (ideally on appropriately headed paper) stating:

- The name of the school for which the product is required;
- The purpose for which that product is required;
- The total quantity required.

Pharmacies are not required to provide inhalers or spacers free of charge to schools: the schools must pay for them as a retail item.

For further information, including templates for parental consent forms, please see the Department of Health [guidance on the use of emergency salbutamol inhalers in schools](#) document.

3. Guidance on adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs)

In line with Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) [recommendation on the use of AAIs](#) it has been agreed across South East Essex that all patients requiring AAIs, including children, should be prescribed **two** AAIs only and the patient should be advised to carry them both with them / have immediate access to them at all times.

AAIs should be prescribed by brand. The current licensed brands available are Epipen[®], Jext[®] and Emerade[®]. As brands are linked to a specific device and triggering mechanism, patients should be trained on and maintained on the same brand, where possible.

From 1st October 2017, legislation changed to allow schools to purchase AAIs, without a prescription, for emergency use in children who are at risk of anaphylaxis but their own device is not available or working (e.g. because it is broken or out-of-date). This change applies to all primary and secondary schools (including independent schools) in the UK.

Schools are not required to hold AAI(s) – this is a discretionary change enabling schools to do this if they wish. Schools that choose to hold spare AAI(s) should establish a policy or protocol for their use in line with DfE guidance. The protocol should be incorporated into the schools' wider medical policy.

The school can purchase AAIs in a similar way to salbutamol inhalers. For further information please see the Department of Health [guidance on the use of adrenaline auto-injectors in schools](#) document.

The DfE and National Union of Teachers recommends that for use at schools, wherever possible, the child should be allowed to carry their own medicines and relevant devices or have quick and easy access to them for self-medication at all times. Parental permission is normally required for the child to self-administer or for appropriately trained staff to help administer if a child is unable to do so themselves.

Alternative arrangements will need to be made where the child is not thought to be able to look after their own medication, e.g. AAIs to be kept in the child's classroom and the responsible adult for that child should be aware of where the AAIs are located.

References:

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3. Department for Education (2015) Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools and proprietors of academies in England.

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9. NHS Choices: <http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>
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<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/employment/gp-practices/quality-first/manage-inappropriate-workload/prescribing-non-prescription-medication>
12. Royal Pharmaceutical Society (2014) *Supplying salbutamol inhalers to schools: A quick reference guide.*
13. Royal Pharmaceutical Society (2017) *Supply of spare adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs) to schools: Quick reference guide.*
14. Prescribing of over the counter medicines is changing: patient leaflets
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/prescribing-of-over-the-counter-medicines-is-changing/>
15. Department of Health. Guidance on the use of emergency salbutamol inhalers in schools, March 2015. Accessed 24.04.18 via:
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16. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society
<https://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Pharmacy/Pages/Yourmedicinecabinet.aspx>
17. Self-Care Forum <http://www.selfcareforum.org/>
18. NHS Choices <https://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>

Further reading:

[Medical conditions at school partnership](#) – includes an example school policy, a form for a healthcare plan, other forms for record keeping, and information on specific health conditions.

Supporting pupils with medical conditions: links to other useful resources. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-pupils-at-school-with-medical-conditions--3/supporting-pupils-with-medical-conditions-links-to-other-useful-resources--2>

Resuscitation council <https://www.resus.org.uk/#>

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