Link
NICE CKS: allergic rhinitis

Seasonal Allergic Rhinitis

(For children aged 3 to 11 years)

NHS England

Child presenting with symptoms of seasonal allergic rhinitis (hay fever)

Does the child have ANY of the following?
- High fever, severe facial pain or facial swelling
- Marked, one-sided or painful eye swelling; double or reduced vision, severe eye pain or photophobia
- Acute wheeze or breathlessness
- Persistent one-sided blockage or discharge, blood-stained discharge, suspected mass or foreign body
- Recurrent or heavy nosebleeds, or recent nasal injury or surgery

YES

Onward referral
- Life-threatening emergency: A&E or 999
- Eye, facial or breathing red flags, or persistent one-sided blockage or mass: same-day general practice, out-of-hours service or A&E
- Other features above: general practice

NO

Does the child have typical features of seasonal allergic rhinitis?
- Symptoms on both sides, at the same time each year (pollen season)
- Sneezing, nasal itching, clear watery discharge or nasal blockage
- Itchy, red or watery eyes may also be present

NO

Allergic rhinitis less likely
Consider another diagnosis, such as perennial allergic rhinitis, a viral illness, sinusitis, enlarged adenoids, a foreign body, or symptoms linked to regular decongestant nasal spray use
Self-care advice where suitable; otherwise onward referral: general practice

YES

Does the child meet ALL of the following criteria for prescribing?
- Still symptomatic despite an adequate trial of a non-sedating antihistamine, or antihistamine unsuitable or not tolerated
- Symptoms materially affect sleep or usual activities
- Child and parent or carer can use the nasal spray correctly

NO

Self-care or onward referral
If a non-sedating antihistamine has not been tried: advise one as self-care
If asthma is not well controlled: arrange a general practice or asthma review; rhinitis treatment may continue if otherwise suitable

YES

Offer an age-licensed intranasal corticosteroid plus self-care, informed by NICE CKS and the local formulary, taking account of the NHS Community Pharmacy Clinical Prescribing Guidance
Review effectiveness, adherence and tolerability before a second prescription for the current pollen season, where appropriate

FOR ALL PATIENTS: share self-care and safety-netting advice

Self-care
- Demonstrate nasal-spray technique and regular daily use
- Explain that full benefit may take up to 4 weeks
- Patient information: NHS website: hay fever
- Pollen forecast: Asthma + Lung UK pollen calendar

Safety-netting
- Seek urgent help for marked, one-sided or painful eye swelling, visual change, facial swelling or breathing difficulty
- Return for review if not improving with regular use or if a further prescription is needed

RETURNING PATIENT

RETURNING PATIENT: pharmacist review
- Check new red flags or one-sided symptoms
- Check regular use, spray technique, tolerability and response
- For nosebleeds, check technique and nasal inflammation; refer if persistent, heavy or recurrent
- If improved, consider a second prescription for the current pollen season, where appropriate

If not improved despite regular use and correct technique
Onward referral: general practice

This pathway supports, but does not replace, professional judgement.

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