Minor Ailment Schemes in England – FAQs

May 2015

1. **What is a minor ailment?**

Minor ailments are ‘common or self-limiting or uncomplicated conditions which can be diagnosed and managed without medical intervention; this includes ailments such as coughs, colds, sore throats and earache.

2. **What is a minor ailment scheme?**

Community Pharmacy based services to treat minor ailments, were introduced locally across the UK more than ten years ago to reduce the burden of minor ailments on higher cost settings such as general practice and the A&E departments of hospitals.

These schemes cover a defined set of minor ailments to defined sets of populations. Both of these criteria will vary in different parts of England as they are designed to meet local need.

In some instances these schemes are for time limited periods to cover seasonal variation such as during the winter when more of the population is suffering from cough and colds.

Medicines are only available via this scheme to those who genuinely need them and would otherwise have to go to visit a GP to obtain a prescription to access them.

Independent research into these schemes commissioned by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society ([http://pharmacyresearchuk.org/waterway/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/MINA-Study-Final-Report.pdf](http://pharmacyresearchuk.org/waterway/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/MINA-Study-Final-Report.pdf)) shows that treatment results were equally good regardless of whether patients were treated at a pharmacy, Emergency Department or GP practice.

3. **Is this an NHS Funded Service?**

Yes it is commissioned predominantly by local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). It should be noted that not every CCG has made the decision to commission this service.

There is no national list of which CCGs do commission this type of service. However NHS England believes that there are currently around about 70 of these schemes in operation.
As the schemes are commissioned locally it is not possible to state how much this type of service costs the NHS annually.

4. **Is the service open to everyone?**

Usually these schemes are only open to patients who would otherwise be eligible for free prescriptions as outlined [here](#) and it is a requirement of these services that the pharmacist assesses the eligibility of the person requesting before supplying relevant medicine if one is needed.

5. **Do I have to register with the pharmacy to receive the service?**

This will vary. In some areas the scheme dictates that the patient must register with a pharmacy either directly or via their GP to take part in the scheme. In other areas the patient will be able to present at a pharmacy taking part in the scheme and ask if they can receive the service. There is no national register of patients for a minor ailment scheme.

6. **How do I know if my local pharmacy is participating in this scheme?**

These services are promoted locally to target populations and patients can be referred from NHS 111 or by GP practices. All types of pharmacy (small independent pharmacies, supermarket pharmacies and high street pharmacies) take part in these schemes where they are available.

7. **What products can I receive on the scheme?**

This will depend on what has been agreed locally. Ultimately the decision to issue a medicine will be based on the confidential conversation that takes place with a pharmacist. In some circumstances that decision might be that it is not appropriate to issue a medicine.

8. **Is there a limit to how many times I can use the scheme?**

This may vary from one part of the country to the next. However in general terms if you seek advice and treatment about the same minor ailment in a very short space of time the pharmacist may decide that you need to see a doctor, or other relevant healthcare professional, to be sure that your healthcare needs are being properly addressed.

9. **How does a Minor Ailment Scheme differ from a Pharmacy First Scheme or a Common Ailments Scheme?**

These are all just different names for the same type of service.