Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System

NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board

Q & A - Cow's Milk Protein Allergy (CMPA) infant formula reduction in spend on inappropriate prescribing (Medicines Optimisation ECF 2025/26 quality indicator)

1. What does the 2025/26 ONS based ECF quality indicator include?

The new 2025/26 ECF quality indicator requires practices to achieve a reduction in spend of 25% from baseline for CMPA infant formula prescribing in patients aged 0 - 4 years. Eligible only for practices with baseline rates of >£30 per head of patients aged 0 – 4 years. This metric is based on 12 months' rolling data.

2. Why is this work being done?

CMPA affects 2-3% of infants living in the U.K. Many infants and children are prescribed a CMPA infant formula which forms the basis of the exclusion diet required to treat the allergy.
Diagnosing CMPA is challenging, and adherence to published guidance is essential to ensure patient care and safety. Overdiagnosis can lead to unnecessary exclusion of foods, impacting a child's clinical and nutritional wellbeing, as well as quality of life for patients and parents/carers. Issues like failure to confirm diagnosis through key steps, overuse of costly amino acid-based formulas and prolonged and unnecessary prescribing highlight the need for better integration of guidelines into primary care.

3. What is the evidence to support this work?

The NICE Food allergy in under 19's: assessment and diagnosis CG116 highlights primary care's role in allergy management, detailing steps for diagnosis, including home milk challenge, and referral to specialists when indicated. The Milk Allergy in Primary Care (iMAP) guideline 2019 complements this by providing treatment algorithms that support breastfeeding, appropriate CMPA formula selection, safe reintroduction of cow's and the pivotal role of paediatric dietitians.
The cost to the ICB of prescribed CMPA formulas was £2.5 million in 2023/24 and is expected to remain the same for 2024/25. If the System Value Target of <£22 per patient aged 0-4 years was achieved across the ICB, cost savings could be as great as £600k, demonstrating that there is a significant opportunity to reduce costs alongside improving patient care.

4. What can clinicians do to reduce the spend on CMPA infant formula prescribing?

a. Protect and support breastfeeding by appropriate signposting to support alongside ensuring evidence-based practice regarding continuation of breastfeeding and need for exclusion diets.
b. Be aware of the ICS CMPA guidance and supporting documents which incorporate diagnosis and management pathways for CMPA and applies across the ICS.
c. Access education on CMPA to increase awareness of:
    - different presentations
    - how to confirm diagnosis in primary care when appropriate and safe to do so
    - appropriate selection and prescribing of CMPA infant formula
    - when and how to end CMPA formula prescription
    - ensure all patients are referred to the dietitian in a timely manner
d. Support caregivers to access relevant ICS patient resources.
e. Before further prescriptions of CMPA formula are issued, ensure the following are evidenced:
    - type of CMPA suspected

- proposed diagnosis pathway
- documentation of treatment plans

f. Date of review to ensure follow up of home milk challenge.
g. Review all prescriptions for children aged 1 year and over to determine whether they can be stopped in line with ICS guidance.

5. Are there any ICB tools to support this piece of work?

Cow's milk protein allergy (CMPA) guidance The main CMPA guidance document for healthcare professionals in Herts and West Essex. It includes signs, symptoms, diagnosis, referral information, treatment and links to supporting resources.
Patient information leaflet – Cow's milk free diet for breastfeeding mums Information leaflet for breastfeeding mums whose child has displayed symptoms of CMPA when being solely breastfed.
GP Practices FAQs for CMPA Resource for practices detailing frequently asked questions, to support understanding of CMPA and adherence with HWE CMPA guidance.
Patient FAQs for CMPA Information leaflet for parents/carers detailing frequently asked questions, to support understanding of CMPA and why certain advice is given.
CMPA formula flow chart If a prescribed CMPA formula is required to meet some or all requirements, flow chart details the expected timeline of a CMPA formula prescription, including circumstances where it may be required for longer.
Patient Information Leaflet - Moving from CMPA formula to a fortified non-dairy alternative milk. Information leaflet for parents/carers detailing commonly asked questions regarding products to use that will meet children's dietary needs.
Guidance for GP Practices - Stopping CMPA formula at 1 year

6. What else is the ICB doing to support this work?

HWE ICB primary care clinicians can access a recorded webinar on the HWE training hub Cow's Milk Protein Allergy (CMPA): Supporting Diagnosis and Management in Primary Care

The webinar will be repeated and will be widely publicised approximately 6 weeks prior to the event to allow you to register. For more information and information on free access to this training please email hweicbhv.medicinesoptimisationteam@nhs.net

Searches for EMIS Web are available can be downloaded from EMIS Enterprise (SWH) or both EMIS Web and SystmOne searches are available from PMOT by emailing hweicbhv.medicinesoptimisationteam@nhs.net

Guidance for GP Practices - Stopping CMPA formula at 1 year

7. Supporting Web pages

Nutrition & Hydration HWE ICS Nutrition and Hydration guidelines and resources

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