

Medicines Matters



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Asthma Update: Stopping SABA-only prescriptions

NICE Asthma guidelines (NG245) updated in November 2024, advises clinicians to NOT prescribe short-acting beta-2 agonists (SABAs), like salbutamol, without a co-prescribed anti-inflammatory (ICS) inhaler. This is relevant to all patient groups.

First line asthma treatment now recommends Anti-inflammatory Reliever (AIR) or Maintenance and Reliever Therapy (MART) instead of SABA monotherapy. Ensuring patients receive anti-inflammatory treatment reduces severe asthma attacks, hospitalisations, and mortality.

Why the change?

- **Increased risk:** Overusing SABA and prescribing SABA-alone, is linked to a higher risk of severe asthma attacks, hospital admissions, and even death. [MHRA alert: April 2025](#)
- **Poor outcomes:** Clinical outcomes are consistently worse for patients treated with SABA alone across all age groups.
- **Better control:** Combination inhalers used in AIR or MART are recommended to control asthma by addressing both inflammation and symptoms.

What are the new recommendations?

- **Check diagnosis & stop Salbutamol/Terbutaline ONLY prescriptions:** no one should receive reliever only treatment.
- **Switch to AIR or MART:** Asthma patients currently using SABA monotherapy should be moved to an AIR or MART treatment regimen.
- **All patients need an ICS:** Inhaled corticosteroids are key to managing the underlying inflammation in lungs. All asthma patients should have an ICS prescribed.
- **Importance of Review:** Regular asthma reviews are crucial to optimise treatment and ensure SABA use is not excessive.

Useful information and resources to support a change in treatment?

Extensive resources are available to support this work and are listed below:

Clinician Resources	Patient Resources
<p>Local Asthma Treatment Guideline from LSC (12 years and over) - Stepwise guidance from traditional to new treatment pathways including cost-effective inhaler choices. Guidelines for children are being updated - check net formulary for updates</p>	<p>AccuRx messages – example invites for patient recall.</p>
<p>NICE Asthma treatment algorithms: easy-to-read guide showing treatment pathways and how to switch from fixed dose regimens.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algorithm C - management of asthma 12+ • Algorithm D - management of asthma, age 6-11 • Algorithm E - management of asthma, under 5 	<p>Patient letter - Asthma diagnosis, SABA only prescribed - example letter invite for patient recall.</p>
<p>AIR & MART Quick Reference Inhaler Guide - practical guide to inhalers currently available for adults and children, formulary options, licenses, directions and more.</p>	<p>Patient letter - No diagnosis, SABA review required – example letter invite for patient recall.</p>
<p>MART Myth Busters Webinar - produced by LSC respiratory specialists to answer common queries about AIR & MART</p>	<p>Asthma fixed dose regimen - Patient information leaflet: Asthma should be free of symptoms - is yours?</p>
<p>Guide to prevent inhaler duplication errors – Guide simplifying inhaler ingredients and classification of drug group.</p>	<p>Asthma fixed dose regimen – Patient video - Greener Practice: What is asthma and how to treat it?</p>
<p>Primary Care Respiratory Society- Slide Rule – Useful tool to calculate number of inhalers ordered/needed and the number of doses provided.</p>	<p>Asthma AIR therapy – AIR patient information from Asthma & Lung UK</p>
<p>Primary Care Respiratory Guidelines: New asthma infographic – alternative useful guide for clinicians to follow for all age groups</p>	<p>Asthma MART therapy - MART patient information from Asthma & Lung UK</p>
<p>EMIS searches to find patients on SABA-only with or without a diagnosis</p>	<p>AIR & MART therapy patient video - Understanding MART and AIR Inhalers - video from Greener Practice</p>

Alternatively access all respiratory resources via the Medicines Optimisation Intranet [Respiratory – Lancashire and South Cumbria Primary Care Intranet](#) (listed under Clinical Areas, Respiratory, Practice Support Resources).

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