

Infant Seborrhoeic dermatitis (Cradle cap) Area Prescribing Committee Position Statement

The routine prescribing of emollients and shampoos for cradle cap is not supported by Barnsley Area Prescribing Committee (APC).

In line with NHS England guidance:

- New patients presenting with infant seborrhoeic dermatitis (cradle cap) should be encouraged to self-care with emollients and shampoos purchased over the counter*.***
- Patients currently prescribed emollients and shampoos for cradle cap should have their prescription reviewed and parents/carers should be encouraged to manage cradle cap with over the counter treatments* as this condition is self-limiting.***

****unless the cradle cap is causing distress to the infant and not improving***

Seborrhoeic dermatitis (Cradle cap) is included in the NHS England guidance '***Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care***'.¹

In Barnsley, primary care expenditure on shampoos for cradle cap between March 2022 and February 2023 was approximately £9,621.

The Medicines Management Team can support primary care prescribers in reviewing patients and deprescribing emollients and shampoos for cradle cap in mild cradle cap where it is not causing distress to the infant. If the cradle cap is not improving, then deprescribing the cradle cap shampoo or emollients and prescribing a suitable alternative may be appropriate.

Background^{1,2}

Emollients and cradle cap shampoos have been routinely prescribed for cradle cap.

Cradle cap is a harmless skin condition that is common in babies. It usually goes away on its own in 6 to 12 months. The main symptom of cradle cap is patches of greasy, scaly skin.

It is usually found on the scalp and face but sometimes affects the nappy area. It can look like:

- Patches of white or yellow greasy scales on the scalp and face that form a crust which may flake off
- Small, dry flakes of skin on the nappy area

The scales look similar on all skin tones. The skin under the scales may look pink or red if the baby has white skin, or lighter or darker than the surrounding skin if the baby has brown or black skin. It is usually not itchy or painful.

Rationale for deprescribing shampoos for cradle cap²

- NHS England guidance states that a prescription for treatment of cradle cap should not routinely be offered in primary care as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment.
- Cradle cap is harmless and doesn't usually itch or cause discomfort. It usually appears in babies in the first two months of life and clears up without treatment within weeks to a few months.

- NICE CKS advises that management should involve the use of simple measures such as the softening of scales with emollient, gentle brushing to loosen scales and washing of the scalp with baby shampoo.

Deprescribing ^{1,2,3}

- Emollient ointments for cradle cap and cradle cap shampoos are included within the NHS England guidance on 'Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care'.
- Counsel the patient to help them understand that the condition is self-limiting and usually clears up within weeks or months. Discuss **alternative treatment options** such as gentle brushing and washing of the scalp with baby shampoo if appropriate. This may involve self-care with an over-the-counter treatment option. Please note the general exceptions on page 2 of the [South Yorkshire self-care guidance](#) do not apply as it is a self-limiting condition.
- Where the cradle cap is causing distress to the infant and not improving then a prescription may be appropriate, e.g. where simple measures such as softening, gentle brushing or baby shampoo have not been effective and the infant is distressed.
- If patients prefer to use an emollient or cradle cap shampoo to treat cradle cap, then these may be purchased from community pharmacies and retail outlets.

Patient information ^{3,4,5}

- The national eczema society have produced a cradle cap factsheet. This is available to download from [Seborrhoeic-dermatitis-and-cradle-cap-in-infants-Jan-22-1.pdf \(eczema.org\)](#)
- Caution - counsel the parent/guardian that creams and emollients can make the surfaces of baths/showers slippery, therefore care is required when getting the infant out of the bath/shower.
- Counsel the parent/guardian not to pick the scales as this can leave raw areas of skin which may increase the risk of infection. If they are unable to remove the scales with simple measures, soften them prior to hair washing with an emollient (purchased over the counter) or unperfumed oil (e.g. vegetable oil, coconut oil or sunflower oil). Olive oil is no longer recommended for use as it has been found to damage the skin barrier. Peanut oil should not be used due to the allergy risk.
- Counsel all patients that emollients carry a fire risk whether they contain paraffin or not.
 - Patients need to be aware that fabrics which have come into contact with an emollient can be highly inflammable even after washing. Washing may reduce build up but not totally remove it.
 - Risks are greater when emollients are applied in large quantities or to large areas of the body.
- Parents/guardians should be told to keep away from flames or fire and not to smoke when using these preparations.

References

1. NHS England guidance 'Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care Guidance for CCGs'. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/otc-guidance-for-ccgs.pdf>. <Accessed April 2023>
2. NHS choices cradle cap. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cradle-cap/> <Accessed April 2023>
3. NICE CKS Seborrhoeic dermatitis. Available at: [Seborrhoeic dermatitis | Health topics A to Z | CKS | NICE](#). <Accessed April 2023>
4. National eczema society seborrhoeic dermatitis and cradle cap in infants guidance. Available at: <https://eczema.org/wp-content/uploads/Seborrhoeic-dermatitis-and-cradle-cap-in-infants-Jan-22-1.pdf>. <Accessed April 2023>
5. MHRA safe use of emollients: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/skin-creams-dried-on-fabric-can-lead-to-fire-deaths#:~:text=In%202018%2C%20following%20new%20evidence,the%20risk%20of%20severe%20burn> <Accessed April 2023>

Development Process

This position statement was ratified at the Area Prescribing Committee on 12th July 2023