



NICE Bites



Respiratory tract infections – antibiotic prescribing

NICE CG69; July 2008

This guideline makes recommendations on when to prescribe antibiotics for self-limiting respiratory tract infections (RTIs) in adults and children (age ≥3 months) in primary care.

Treatment and management

Management follows a care pathway – see full guideline.

Clinical assessment

At first face-to-face contact carry out a clinical assessment including:

- ◆ history,
- ◆ examination as needed to establish diagnosis.

Agree a prescribing strategy with the patient.

Prescribing

Antibiotic prescribing strategies:

No prescribing

Offer patients:

- ◆ reassurance that antibiotics are not needed immediately,
- ◆ a clinical review if the RTI worsens or becomes prolonged.

Delayed prescribing

Offer patients a delayed prescription and:

- ◆ reassurance that antibiotics are not needed immediately,
- ◆ advice about:
 - using the delayed prescription if symptoms do not settle or get significantly worse,
 - re-consulting if symptoms get significantly worse despite using the delayed prescription.

A delayed prescription can be given to the patient **or** collected at a later date.

Counselling

Advise patients:

- ◆ that antibiotics are not needed immediately because:
 - they will make little difference to symptoms **and**
 - may cause adverse effects e.g. diarrhoea, vomiting, rash,
- ◆ of the natural course of the illness including average total illness length: see Table 1,
- ◆ how to manage symptoms e.g. fever.
For children younger than 5 years see [NICE CG47: Feverish illness in children](#).

Table 1

RTI	Average total illness length
Acute otitis media	4 days
Acute sore throat / pharyngitis / tonsillitis	7 days
Common cold	1½ weeks
Acute rhinosinusitis	2½ weeks
Acute cough / bronchitis	3 weeks

No antibiotic or delayed antibiotic prescribing

Use this strategy for patients with:

- ◆ acute otitis media,
- ◆ acute sore throat / pharyngitis / tonsillitis,
- ◆ common cold,
- ◆ acute rhinosinusitis,
- ◆ acute cough / bronchitis.

However, an **immediate** prescribing strategy may be appropriate for the following subgroups of patients:

- ◆ children younger than 2 years with bilateral acute otitis media,
- ◆ children with otorrhoea who have acute otitis media,
- ◆ patients with acute sore throat / pharyngitis / tonsillitis when three or more Centor criteria* are present.

Immediate antibiotic prescribing or further investigation and/or management

Immediate antibiotic prescribing should be offered to:

- ◆ those who are systemically very unwell,
- ◆ those with symptoms and signs suggestive of serious illness and/or complications (particularly pneumonia, mastoiditis, peritonsillar abscess, peritonsillar cellulitis, intraorbital or intracranial complications),
- ◆ those at high risk of serious complications because of pre-existing comorbidity including:
 - heart, lung, renal, liver or neuromuscular disease,
 - immunosuppression,
 - cystic fibrosis,
 - young children who were born prematurely.
- ◆ patients older than 65 years with acute cough and *two or more of the following criteria*, **OR** patients older than 80 years with acute cough and *one or more of the following criteria*:
 - hospitalisation in previous year,
 - type 1 or type 2 diabetes,
 - history of congestive heart failure,
 - current use of oral glucocorticoids.

*Centor criteria are: presence of tonsillar exudate, tender anterior cervical lymphadenopathy or lymphadenitis, history of fever and an absence of cough.

The table below lists all NICE guidance included in NICE Bites in 2009. These can be accessed at www.nelm.nhs.uk; from the Home page select the Health in Focus section

NICE Guidance	NICE Bites	
ADHD	CG72;September 2008	January 09/01
Anxiety	CG22;April 2007	January 09/01
Atopic eczema in children	CG57;December 2007	October 09/10
Chronic kidney disease	CG73;September 2008	April 09/04
Depression (updated and replaced October 2009)	CG23;April 2007(superseded)	January 09/01
Depression in adults (update)	CG90;October 2009	November 09/11
Depression with a chronic physical health problem	CG91;October 2009	November 09/11
Diarrhoea and vomiting in children under 5	CG84;April 2009	May 09/05
Familial hypercholesterolaemia	CG71;August 2008	August 09/08
Glaucoma	CG85;April 2009	May 09/05
Lipid modification	CG67;May 2008	August 09/08
Low back pain	CG88;May 2009	July 09/07
Medicines adherence	CG76;January 2009	March 09/03
MI: secondary prevention	CG48;May 2007	September 09/09
Osteoarthritis	CG59;February 2008	February 09/02
Osteoporosis – primary prevention	TA160;October 2008	February 09/02
Osteoporosis – secondary prevention including strontium ranelate	TA161;October 2008	February 09/02
Respiratory tract infections – antibiotic prescribing	CG69;July 2008	December 09/12
Rheumatoid arthritis	CG79;April 2009	March 09/03
Schizophrenia (update)	CG82;March 2009	April 09/04
Stroke	CG68;July 2008	July 09/07
Type 2 diabetes – newer agents (update)	CG87;May 2009	June 09/06
Type 2 diabetes - lipids	CG87;May 2009	August 09/08

This bulletin summarises key prescribing points from NICE guidance. Please refer to the full guidance at www.nice.org.uk for further detail