

Cannabis-based medicinal products Patient Information

1. What are cannabis-based medicinal products?

"Cannabis-based medicinal products" is a broad term for any sort of product prescribed as a medicine that contains either a naturally occurring or man-made substance that would usually be found in cannabis.

A few cannabis-based medicinal products that could not be prescribed before can now be legally prescribed by specialist doctors. These are only likely to benefit a very small number of patients. It remains illegal to possess some cannabis or cannabis-based products for recreational use (such as smoked cannabis) or for medical use without a prescription.

2. Are cannabis-based medicinal products available on the NHS in North Central London?

Very few cannabis-based medicinal products are available in the UK – and these are only used in specific medical conditions. Use outside of these conditions is rare. These conditions include:

- Two forms of rare childhood onset epilepsies which are resistant to conventional anti-epileptic treatments (named Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome and Dravet Syndrome). The medicine is available under specialist epilepsy clinics in North Central London in line with National guidance for a product named Epidyolex®.
- Nausea and vomiting caused by cancer chemotherapy which has failed to respond to conventional treatments (using a product called nabilone).
- Severe spasticity in Multiple Sclerosis (treated with a product named Sativex®).

These products have proven to be safe and effective to treat these conditions.

No other products are currently available in North Central London. Only Specialists who can demonstrate that an available cannabis-based medicinal product can fulfil an unmet clinical need can apply to use it within their practice.

3. What about products available to buy without a prescription?

Some cannabis-based products are available to buy over the internet without a prescription. It's likely most of these products may be illegal to possess or supply because of the chance they contain an illegal substance named tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

There's a good chance they will be of low quality, containing ingredients that are unsafe to use, or the quantities in the product are unknown.

Health stores sell certain types of "pure CBD", however there's no guarantee these products will be of good quality either. And they tend to only contain very small amounts of CBD, so it's not clear what effect they would have.

It is therefore advised not to buy medical cannabis or related products on the internet or without a prescription.

4. Can I get a prescription for a cannabis-based medicinal product from my hospital consultant?

As described above, cannabis-based medicinal products are only available in North Central London for a very small number of conditions. Unless you suffer from one of the named conditions in Section 2, you are not likely to be prescribed a cannabis-based medicinal product from your hospital consultant.

Although hospital consultants on a specialist register are legally allowed to write a prescription for some products, this is subject to several restrictions. If you do suffer from one of the medical conditions listed in Section 2 and following review with your consultant you are evaluated to be a suitable candidate for an approved therapy, your consultant may decide to prescribe a cannabis-based treatment for you.

The North Central London Joint Formulary Committee are supporting prescribers across North Central London with information on the safety and effectiveness of medical cannabis products, which products are available and when these are appropriate to be prescribed.

5. Can I get a prescription for cannabis-based medicinal products from my GP?

Only Sativex® for patients with multiple sclerosis can be prescribed by a GP; this is only after it has been initiated by a specialist hospital doctor to show it has been effective after the first four weeks of treatment and the first three months of treatment is supplied by the hospital. GPs cannot prescribe the other available products at present; these can only be prescribed by a specialist hospital doctor.

6. I already use a cannabis-based medicinal product – can I get more from my GP or consultant?

If you already use a cannabis-based medicinal product under medical supervision, you should continue to obtain this through your regular route of supply. If you are admitted to hospital, please ensure you bring supplies of your cannabis-based medicinal product and any documentation that came with the product with you, as the hospital will not be able to supply more during your admission.

7. When will this position be updated?

The North Central London position will be updated when either new cannabis-based medicinal products become available in North Central London, when national healthcare bodies update National guidance or when new guidance for prescribers is made by the Joint Formulary Committee.