# Changes to Rescue Packs – Patient Information

**What is a rescue pack?**

A rescue pack is a course of amoxicillin (antibiotic) and prednisolone (steroid) that is kept at home and then taken when you become unwell.

**What was the old system?**

In the past we allowed all patients with COPD to request rescue packs because there was some evidence this reduced hospital admissions for COPD.

**Why are you changing the system?**

More evidence has now come out and it shows that hospital admission are not reduced by the use of rescue packs. This changes the balance of benefits and risks.

We reviewed our prescribing of these medicines and found that use by some patients is quite high. We are worried about the risk of this and believe a new system would be safer.

**What are the risks of these medicines?**

**Antibiotics** – the more antibiotics we prescribe the more resistance is likely to develop. This means they may not work as well in the future. They can cause side effects like diarrhoea and upset the balance of good bacteria in the body.

**Steroids** – have many side effects. One of these is thinning of the bones leading to an increase in the risk of a certain type of fracture to the bones of the back called vertebrae. They can also cause weight gain and cataracts as well other complications.

**What is the new system?**

Patients will not be given rescue packs to keep at home but will need to speak to a clinician to have them prescribed when they need them. Please phone at 8am or 2pm to make a telephone triage apt. In many cases medication can be prescribed if needed without seeing you face to face but if an examination is needed we will invite you in for this. If there are no appointments left tell the reception team that you are unwell and think you need a rescue pack and we will do our best to fit you in as soon as possible.

**What are the signs I may need antibiotics or steroids?**

Antibiotics may be needed if the phlegm you cough up changes or darkens in colour particularly if you are having high temperatures. Often you also feel breathless. If you are significantly more breathless than normal for you such that it is interfering with your normal daily activities then steroids may also be needed. Your clinician can help to make this assessment with you and decide on the balance of benefits and risks for you.

**What if I get worse?**

If you are not improving you should contact the surgery so that we can reassess you. If your lips turn blue or you are struggling for breath even when you are not doing anything then you may need to call 999 and go to hospital.

**What should I do when I have recovered?**

We would like all patients to have a COPD review with one of our practice nurses after they have had a flare up. This is so their inhalers can be reviewed and we can make sure you are on the right treatment to minimise your chances of having flare ups.

**Will anyone be able get a rescue pack to keep at home?**

There may be a small number of patients who need to have rescue packs at home. This might be because they have had to be admitted to hospital in the past for their chest and infection could put them at high risk of serious illness. If we think this is the case for you we will talk to you about it at your COPD review.

**What can I do to reduce the risk of infections or exacerbations?**

Annual COPD reviews are really important because we check your symptoms and your use of inhalers and make sure you are on the best treatment. It is also a good opportunity to talk about any problems or concerns that you have. Other treatments such as pulmonary rehabilitation or pneumococcal vaccination can also be offered at the COPD review. Please make sure you attend your review every year when it is due.

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