

Policy Statement: Do not prescribe co-proxamol for acute or chronic pain

Recommended actions:

- **DO NOT NEWLY PRESCRIBE CO-PROXAMOL TABLETS TO ANY PATIENT FOR ANY INDICATION.**
- **Prescribers should review all existing patients on co-proxamol tablets with the view to switching to an alternative licensed analgesic. Co-proxamol still poses a significant risk to patients.**

Providers commissioned to provide services on behalf of NHS Wirral CCG are reminded that they are required to follow the local joint formulary and prescribing guidance.

Background

Co-proxamol is an unlicensed analgesic, containing paracetamol 325mg and dextropropoxyphene 32.5mg. Co-proxamol was withdrawn from the UK market in 2005 amidst safety concerns in therapeutic use, abuse potential and a lack of evidence of efficacy.

In 2016/2017 £77K of co-proxamol was prescribed within NHS Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group.

The unlicensed status of co-proxamol means it is a significant high cost, compared to other licensed more cost effective alternatives (cost of co-proxamol 100 tablets on the Wirral ranges from £46.58-£458.58).

Rationale for switching from co-proxamol to an alternative analgesic:

- Co-proxamol is now unlicensed and is only available on a 'named patient' basis, so all prescribing responsibility will rest solely on the prescriber.
- There is no robust clinical evidence that co-proxamol is more effective than full strength paracetamol used alone in either acute or chronic use.
- No patient group has been identified in which the risk:benefit ratio of using co-proxamol is positive.
- Death from co-proxamol overdose can occur rapidly, even before hospital treatment can be received. The risk of dying after co-proxamol overdose is 2.3 times greater than that for tricyclic antidepressants and 28.1 times greater than that for paracetamol.
- There is a risk of addiction and abuse or misuse associated with co-proxamol tablets.
- The lethal dose of co-proxamol is relatively low and can be potentiated by alcohol and other central nerve depressants.
- Clinical data from USA has shown that dextropropoxyphene, even at normal therapeutic doses, can have serious effects on the electrical activity of the heart.
- The paracetamol contained in each co-proxamol tablet is at a lower dose (325mg) than in standard over the counter preparations (500mg).

References:

- [Wirral Medicines Formulary - CNS- pain relief](#)
- [PrescQIPP co-proxamol 2013](#)
- [Co-proxamol withdrawal: reminder to prescribe](#) 2007 MHRA
- [Withdrawal of co-proxamol](#) 2008 MHRA
- [Letter to healthcare professional](#) 2005 MHRA
- [Questions and answers](#) 2005 MHRA