

HEALTHY START VITAMINS

Your health challenge

- Pregnant and lactating women, infants and children under four are at risk of vitamin D deficiency¹
- Families in lower-income groups tend to have less vitamin C in their diet²
- Everyone over one year of age should consume 10 micrograms of vitamin D daily¹

Fact: 8% of children under five in the UK don't have enough vitamin A in their diet¹



How can community pharmacies help?

Healthy Start is a UK-wide Government scheme established to improve the health of low-income pregnant women and young children in families receiving benefits and tax credits.

Many community pharmacies are located on high streets or in supermarkets and are therefore conveniently placed to supply daily supplements to those who need them.

Results from a Vitamin D Healthy Start service in Lewisham³ pharmacies included:

- 22% of registrations were from people who had heard about the scheme through a pharmacy;
- The total number of vitamins distributed by one service in its first year was: 2,138 to pregnant women; 5,988 to postnatal women; and 13,975 to children; and
- the service was a runner up in the Chemist+Druggist Public Health Initiative of the Year 2014 Award.⁴

1. Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, Vitamin F and health report (2016)

2. Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, The Nutritional Wellbeing of the British Population. London: TSO (2008)

3. Results from the first year of running the Healthy Start vitamins service Lewisham (December 2013 to November 2014)

4. Lewisham's Healthy Start vitamins service

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What the experts say

“Access to the Healthy Start vitamins has got easier for patients via their local pharmacy by means of a service which pharmacy staff can easily deliver with minimum training. For a service which was poorly delivered by the previous providers, the commissioners have got more than their money's worth via community pharmacy.”

Jayesh Patel, Former CEO of Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham LPC

“Working collaboratively with pharmacies has increased access to and uptake of the Healthy Start vitamins. Since launching the scheme in November 2013, the uptake of women's tablets has gone up from 10% to approximately 30% and the uptake of children's drops has increased from 6% to approximately 30% of eligible infants (0-4years), with over 50% of infants under the age of one starting the drops.”

London Borough of Lewisham (Public Health)

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Potential benefits of a community pharmacy Healthy Start vitamins service

1. Meet government targets on vitamin D levels for at risk groups

The Department of Health and Social Care has issued recommendations on those who need to increase their uptake of vitamin D through the use of supplements. Community pharmacy teams are the most accessible healthcare provider and the sector as a whole has the opportunity to interact with 1.6m people every day.⁵

2. Increase access to the Healthy Start scheme

The uptake of Healthy Start vitamins has so far been very low in some areas. Using community pharmacies to increase the number of Healthy Start distributors helps increase access for those eligible for the scheme.

3. Save NHS money and resources

By increasing access, pharmacies are also helping reduce the number of cases and cost burden of vitamin D deficiency and rickets.

Fact: More than 23 million vitamin D preparations were dispensed in the community in 2017.⁶

4. More accessibility in socially disadvantaged areas

Community pharmacies are accessible to vulnerable patients and populations, with many located in socially disadvantaged areas (89% of the population in England has access to a community pharmacy within a 20 minute walk and over 99% of those in areas of highest deprivation are within a 20 minute walk of a community pharmacy).⁷ This means they are more open to groups of people who are unable to access, or uncomfortable in accessing, other Healthy Start distributors.

How might your local service work?

Those groups eligible for the Healthy Start scheme are more likely to live in deprived communities and, with the average adult visiting a pharmacy 16 times a year,⁵ pharmacy teams are able to reach those who may not come into contact with other healthcare professionals.

In Lewisham, families can now access the vitamins from any one of 45 participating pharmacies and, due to referral into the scheme from other healthcare professionals or children centre staff, come with prior knowledge.

Health Champions in Lewisham's Healthy Living Pharmacies (HLPs) are also providing details of the scheme to people they identify as possibly being eligible and this has helped raise awareness amongst the target patient groups.

Using an online data collection system at registration and distribution of Healthy Start vitamins enables uptake to be monitored by commissioners using various different parameters (e.g. ward, age, ethnicity) and this

5. Department of Health, *Pharmacy in England: Building on strength – delivering the future* (2008)

6. *Prescription Cost Analysis England* (2017)

7. *The positive pharmacy care law: an area-level analysis of the relationship between community pharmacy distribution, urbanity and social deprivation in England*, *BMJ Open* (August 2014)

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can help in planning targeted public health campaigns to increase uptake.

The Lewisham service covers the provision of vitamin D, but the Healthy Start scheme also provides pregnant women and families with vouchers for drops for children containing vitamins A and C, and tablets for women containing vitamin C and folic acid. These vitamin products can help reduce the risk of certain health problems experienced by those with vitamin deficiencies, for example, rickets.

Commissioners could consider expanding the existing Healthy Start scheme further; for example, NHS North East London and the City's service includes *all* pregnant women and new mothers, and *all* children under four years old. Having a non-means tested service ensures that every new mother and child is starting on a good path by receiving the vitamins they need.

This type of service would also provide pharmacy teams with the opportunity to discuss other issues with patients such as maternity services, breastfeeding, healthy nutrition, and immunisation. Pharmacy staff could also signpost to other local support services available to them.

For contact details of your LPC please visit lpc-online.org.uk