

Communications toolkit – Changes to NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix prescriptions

Phase: implementation of new policy – 1 April 2026

(FINAL: 11/02/26)

About this toolkit

This toolkit is for GP practices across the North East and North Cumbria.

This toolkit includes information and resources to use across your own channels to help raise awareness with patients about the changes to NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix. The online resources can be found [on our website](#).

Your support in helping us to share these messages is very much appreciated.

For further help or advice on using this toolkit, or if you need support to tailor assets, please contact: nencicb.comms.nhs.net

Overview

The following sets out our plans to communicate to patients about the changes to NHS gluten-free bread and flour mix across the North East and North Cumbria.

Background

In summer 2025, the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board held a six-week listening period on a proposal to stop prescribing gluten-free bread and flour mix. More than 1,400 comments were received.

The region's NHS currently provides gluten-free bread and flour mix to around 4,000 people, many of whom have a diagnosis of coeliac disease, at a cost of around £700,000 a year.

NHS England has said commissioning organisations can stop prescribing gluten-free foods if that is appropriate for their population. Many other areas in England have already stopped gluten-free prescribing.

All NHS prescriptions are handled through a rigorous process designed to ensure safe use of medicines, so a packet of bread mix can cost the NHS more than £10, compared to around £2.27 in a supermarket.

The ICB decided, taking into consideration the feedback received from [engagement on the proposed changes](#), that children and young people under 25 years old would continue to receive NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix on prescription. **From 1 April 2026, anyone aged 25 or older will no longer receive NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix.** This new policy is now being implemented.

Key communication activity

- The ICB is sending letters directly to patients affected by the change (where the relevant data has been provided to the ICB by the GP practice). This includes:
 - everybody aged 25 and over who will no longer receive NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix, from 1 April 2026
 - people currently aged 24 who, from their next birthday, will no longer receive NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix
 - in North Cumbria only, people aged from birth to under 25 years will receive a letter to explain the new process of obtaining their NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix prescription
- Where the ICB has not received the relevant patient data, GP practices will need to communicate directly with their patients. The toolkit provides a copy of the relevant letters to use to send to patients. This helps ensure consistent patient messaging across the region.
- Stakeholder communication to aid the implementation of this new policy.

Key dates

- 16 – 20 February – direct mail patient letters distributed to patients, where the ICB has been provided with data.
- 1 April 2026 - everybody aged 25 and over will no longer receive NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix in the North East and North Cumbria.

Toolkit contents

This toolkit contains useful resources, including:

1. Suggested website copy
2. Suggested newsletter copy
3. Printable A4 poster and A5 flyer for North East GPs
4. Printable A4 poster and flyer for North Cumbria GPs
5. Digital TV screen artwork
6. FAQs to help primary care teams answer questions
7. Suggested SMS text messages
8. Copy of the letter sent to patients aged 25 telling them prescriptions/supply of NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix is stopping
9. Copy of the letter sent to patients aged 24 letting them know that on their next birthday, their prescription will stop
10. Copy of letter for North Cumbria patients aged 25, telling them they can no longer get bread/flour mix from the pharmacy
11. Copy of letter for North Cumbria patients aged 5 – 24 years telling them they need to get an NHS prescription in the future

How can you support?

Please use this toolkit to:

- Raise awareness with patients affected by the change in policy.
- Support conversations with patients to encourage a gluten-free diet and try alternatives to bread/flour mix.
- Support teams who may deal with queries about the change in policy.

1. Website copy

Changes to NHS gluten-free prescriptions

From 1 April 2026, NHS prescriptions for gluten-free bread and flour mix will stop for people aged 25 and over.

This change follows a review by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, which included a six-week listening period in summer 2025. More than 1,400 people shared their views, and this feedback helped shape the final decision.

Why is this change happening

- Many areas of England have already stopped prescribing all gluten-free foods
- Gluten-free foods are now widely available in shops and online and are clearly labelled
- A gluten-free bread mix costs the NHS over £10 per item, compared with around £2.27 in a supermarket
- This change helps the NHS use its limited funding to support essential medical care

What this means for you

- If you are 25 or over, you will need to buy gluten-free bread and flour mixes yourself
- You should continue to follow a strict gluten-free diet

What is not changing

- Children and young people under 25 will continue to receive NHS gluten-free bread and flour mix on prescription
- You can still speak to your GP, pharmacist, or healthcare team for advice
- Medical care and support for coeliac disease will continue
- Prescriptions for other medicines are not affected

2. Newsletter copy

Important change to NHS gluten-free prescriptions

From 1 April 2026, NHS prescriptions for gluten-free bread and flour mix will stop for people aged 25 and over.

This decision was made by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board following a review, which included listening to the feedback from more than 1400 people. Children and young people under 25 will continue to receive gluten-free bread and flour mix on prescription.

Gluten-free foods are now widely available in shops and online and are usually cheaper to buy than through NHS prescriptions. Medical care and support for coeliac disease will continue as usual, and other prescriptions are not affected.

If you need advice about managing a gluten-free diet, please speak to your GP, pharmacist, or healthcare team.

3. Poster and flyer to print in the North East – download from online toolkit



Gluten-free
prescription change



Gluten-free
prescription change

4. Poster and flyer to print in North Cumbria – download from online toolkit



Gluten-free
prescription change



Gluten-free
prescription change

5. Digital TV screen artwork – download from online toolkit



6. FAQs to help primary care teams

1. What is changing?

From 1 April 2026, people aged 25 and over will no longer receive NHS prescriptions for gluten-free bread or flour mixes.

2. Who made this decision?

The decision was made by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board after a review and a six-week listening period in summer 2025, where more than 1,400 people shared their views.

3. Who is affected?

- People aged 25 and over will no longer receive NHS prescriptions for gluten-free bread or flour mixes.
- Children and young people under 25 will continue to receive these items on prescription.

4. Why is the NHS making this change?

NHS England allows local NHS organisations to stop prescribing gluten-free foods where appropriate. Many other areas in England have already stopped gluten-free prescribing.

Gluten-free foods are now:

- Widely available in shops and online
- Clearly labelled
- Usually cheaper to buy than through NHS prescriptions

The NHS must use its limited funding carefully to support essential medical care.

5. Does this mean the NHS no longer supports people with coeliac disease?

No. Medical care and support for coeliac disease are not changing. Patients can still speak to their GP, pharmacist, dietitian, or healthcare team for advice and support.

6. Will other prescriptions be affected?

No. This change only applies to gluten-free bread and flour mixes. All other NHS prescriptions remain the same.

7. What do patients aged 25 or over need to do?

Patients aged 25 or over will need to buy gluten-free bread and flour mixes themselves from shops or online and continue to follow a strict gluten-free diet.

8. Why does the NHS say prescriptions cost more?

All NHS prescriptions go through a regulated process to ensure safety. Because of this, a gluten-free bread mix can cost the NHS over £10, compared with around £2.27 in a supermarket.

9. What if a patient is worried or struggling with this change?

Patients should be encouraged to:

- Ask for dietary advice or support
- Discuss any concerns about managing their condition with their healthcare team

Support and clinical care remain available.

10. What should a patient do if they want to complain about the change?

- People can make a formal complaint.
 - Email: nencicb.complaints@nhs.net
 - Freepost: FREEPOST, NENC ICB COMPLAINTS

7. Suggested SMS text messages

- From 1 April 2026, NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix prescriptions stop for patients aged 25+. Care for coeliac disease continues. More info on our website.
- NHS update: From 1 April 2026, patients aged 25+ will no longer get prescriptions for gluten-free bread/flour mix. Under-25s unaffected. See our website.

8. Copy of letter to patients aged 25 and over in the North East

Date: February 2026

Dear patient

Important change to your NHS gluten-free prescription

We are writing to you about the NHS prescription you get for gluten-free bread/flour mix.

What is changing?

From **1 April 2026**, people aged 25 and over will **no longer** get NHS prescriptions for gluten-free bread/flour mix.

Why is this happening?

The NHS has limited money. We need to use it wisely to help as many people as possible. This means we have to make choices about what we can and can't pay for. We made this choice after doing a review of these prescriptions across the North East and North Cumbria.

Gluten-free foods are now:

- easy to find in shops and online
- clearly labelled
- cheaper to buy in shops than through NHS prescriptions.

What does this mean for me?

- You will need to buy gluten-free bread or flour mix yourself from shops or online.
- You should keep to a gluten-free diet.

What is not changing?

- You can still speak to your healthcare team for advice.

- You will still get medical care and support for coeliac disease.
- Prescriptions for other medicines are not affected.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours sincerely

Dr Neil O'Brien

Chief Medical Officer, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

9. Copy of letter to patients aged 24 in the North East

Date: February 2026

Dear patient

Important change to your NHS gluten-free prescription

We are writing to you about the NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix prescription you get. When you are 25 years old, you will no longer get this prescription.

What is changing?

From 1 April 2026, people aged 25 and over will no longer get NHS prescriptions for gluten-free bread/flour mix.

Why is this happening?

The NHS has limited money. We need to use it wisely to help as many people as possible. This means we have to make choices about what we can and can't pay for. We made this choice after doing a review of these prescriptions across the North East and North Cumbria.

Gluten-free foods are now:

- easy to find in shops and online
- clearly labelled
- cheaper to buy in shops than through NHS prescriptions.

What does this mean for me?

When you are 25 years old

- You will need to buy gluten-free bread/flour mix yourself from shops or online
- You should keep to a gluten-free diet.

What is not changing?

- You can still speak to your healthcare team for advice
- You will still get medical care and support for coeliac disease
- Prescriptions for other medicines are not affected.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours sincerely

Dr Neil O'Brien

Chief Medical Officer, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

10. Copy of letter to patients aged 25 in North Cumbria

Date: February 2026

Dear patient

Important change to your NHS gluten-free bread/flour

We are writing to you about the NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix you get.

What is changing?

From **1 April 2026**, people aged 25 and over will **no longer** get NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix from their local pharmacy or by NHS prescription.

Why is this happening?

The NHS has limited money. We need to use it wisely to help as many people as possible. This means we have to make choices about what we can and can't pay for. We made this choice after doing a review of these prescriptions across the North East and North Cumbria.

Gluten-free foods are now:

- easy to find in shops and online
- clearly labelled
- cheaper to buy in shops than through NHS prescriptions.

What does this mean for you?

- You need to buy gluten-free bread/flour mix yourself from shops or online
- You should keep to a gluten-free diet.

What is not changing?

- You can still speak to your healthcare team for advice
- You will get medical care and support for coeliac disease
- Prescriptions for other medicines are not affected.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours sincerely

Dr Neil O'Brien

Chief Medical Officer, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

11. Copy of letter to patients under 25 years in North Cumbria

Date: February 2026

Dear patient

Important change to your NHS gluten-free bread/flour

We are writing about a change to how you get your NHS gluten-free bread/flour.

What is changing?

From 1 April 2026, people aged 24 and under will need to contact their GP to get an NHS prescription for gluten-free bread/flour mix.

You will no longer be able to order gluten-free bread/flour mix at your local pharmacy.

When you are 25 years old, you will no longer get NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix.

Why is this happening?

The NHS has limited money. We need to use it wisely to help as many people as possible. This means we have to make choices about what we can and can't pay for. We made this choice after doing a review of these prescriptions across the North East and North Cumbria.

Gluten-free foods are now:

- easy to find in shops and online
- clearly labelled

- cheaper to buy in shops than through NHS prescriptions.

What does this mean for you?

- You will need to ask your GP for a prescription for gluten-free bread/flour mix
- You should keep to a gluten-free diet.
- When you are aged 25, you will no longer get NHS gluten-free bread/flour mix.

What is not changing?

- You can still speak to your healthcare team for advice
- You will continue to receive medical care and support for coeliac disease
- Prescriptions for other medicines are not affected.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours sincerely

Dr Neil O'Brien

Chief Medical Officer, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board