

Guidance on the Use of Solid Oral Dosage Forms in Children

Hertfordshire & West Essex ICB recommends standard solid oral dosage forms (tablets/capsules) for all patients aged 8 years and above.

For younger children who are unable to take tablets or capsules, alternative solid oral dosage forms (e.g. dispersible tablets, sprinkle capsules) should be considered

Whilst liquid formulations are commonly used in children, teaching tablet or capsule swallowing can commence from 4 years of age with appropriate support, as recommended by NHS England.^[1] In The KidzMed Project study^[2], children aged 5 to 15 were successfully taught to swallow large solid dosage forms. Readiness should be assessed on an individual basis, taking into account developmental stage, confidence, and any swallowing difficulties. HWE ICB recommending standard solid oral dosage forms from 8 years of age recognises the variability in readiness amongst children.^[3] For younger children who are unable to take tablets or capsules, alternative solid dosage forms (e.g. dispersible tablets, sprinkle capsules) should be considered. **Solid oral dosage forms should be prescribed in preference to liquids, where clinically appropriate, as they are more palatable, less wasteful and easier to manage.**

If after a trial of swallowing tablets/capsules whole the child is unable to tolerate standard solid oral dosage forms, prescribers should refer to the local [‘Specials’ Alternatives Guidance](#) for alternative formulation options. This may include use of alternative solid oral dosage forms or, where appropriate, use of off-label administration routes (e.g. dispersing in water, opening capsules). Many medicines are not licensed for use in children (including liquids) and off-label administration is common.

Factors to be considered when selecting an appropriate oral dosage form for children

- **Age and ability** – swallowing skills, manual dexterity, and developmental understanding.
- **Dose accuracy** – liquids may help with small incremental doses, but scored tablets can also provide flexibility.
- **Medicine properties** – taste, stability, and strengths available.
- **Safety** – risk of choking, aspiration, or dosing errors; excipients such as sugar or alcohol in liquids.
- **Practicality/adherence** – portability, storage requirements, and convenience for parents/carers.
- **Cost and availability** – some formulations are more cost-effective and accessible than others.

Benefits of using solid oral dosage forms instead of liquids

- ✓ **Accurate dosing** – fixed strengths reduce measurement and dosing errors.
- ✓ **Greater stability** – longer shelf life, usually no refrigeration needed.
- ✓ **Improved acceptability** – avoids the unpleasant taste of many liquid formulations.
- ✓ **Fewer problematic excipients** – avoids unnecessary sugar, alcohol, or flavourings.
- ✓ **Convenience** – easier to transport and store, more discreet for school/daytime use.
- ✓ **Better availability** – more commonly stocked in community pharmacies and easier to obtain.
- ✓ **More cost-effective** – often significantly cheaper than liquid formulations.

Useful resources

1. [KidzMed](#) contains an eLearning programme to help teach children how to swallow pills and includes supporting resources (pill swallowing technique comic, certificate for children and a leaflet for carers).
2. [How to give different types of medicines – Medicines For Children](#)

For parents/carers – practical guides and videos for parents/carers can be found at the links below:

1. [Medicines For Children - Helping your child to swallow tablets](#)
2. [Healthier Together - Swallowing Pills](#)

References

1. e-Learning for Healthcare - KidzMed. NHS England. Available at: <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/kidzmed/> (Accessed: 22 September 2025).
2. Tse Y, Vasey N, Dua D, Oliver S, Emmet V, Pickering A, Lim E. (2020) 'The KidzMed project: teaching children to swallow tablet medication', Archives of Disease in Childhood Available at: <https://adc.bmj.com/content/105/11/1105.long> (Accessed: 22 September 2025)
3. Mistry, P., Batchelor, H.K., & Stoltenberg, I. (2017) 'Evidence of acceptability of oral paediatric medicines: a review', *Journal of Pharmacy and Pharmacology* Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jphp.12610> (Accessed: 22 September 2025).

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