

**Press Release**

**Immediate Issue: 28 April 2016**

**PROPOSAL BY WORCESTERSHIRE CCGS TO CUT GLUTEN-FREE PRESCRIPTIONS  
COULD COST THE NHS MORE IN THE LONG RUN**

Coeliac UK is strongly opposing the proposed cuts to gluten-free prescriptions by the three Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in Redditch and Bromsgrove, South Worcestershire and Wyre Forest and is concerned these cuts will leave more vulnerable patients with coeliac disease without support. This will affect their ability to stick to the gluten-free diet which is the only treatment for the autoimmune disease.

The potential serious long term health complications of not maintaining a gluten-free diet including osteoporosis, unexplained infertility and, in some rare cases, small bowel cancer could cost the NHS a lot more in the long run.

The three CCGs are currently consulting with local patients and carers about their views on whether to continue to prescribe any gluten-free foods in the area. The consultation runs until 30 May and can be found at: <https://www.snapsurveys.com/wh/s.asp?k=145692897498>. The Charity would like to encourage all those that might be affected to complete the questionnaire so that their opinions are heard.

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition caused by a reaction to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Gluten-free food such as bread which is a staple in the diet is three to four times more expensive\* than gluten-containing counterparts and availability is limited in rural areas and small stores. Having access to gluten-free staple foods on prescription provides an essential level of support to individuals trying to keep to the gluten-free diet.

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that the cost of gluten-free food to the NHS equates to £194.24 per diagnosed patient per year, making it an extremely low cost treatment. Last year the NHS in Worcestershire spent around £300,000 on gluten-free foods for both adults and children.

Sarah Sleet, chief executive of Coeliac UK, the national charity for people with coeliac disease said: "The suggestion by these three CCGs in Worcestershire to restrict access to

gluten-free prescription services, is being based on budgets rather than patient need. The provision of gluten-free staple food on prescription is a vital element of the support offered to these patients by the NHS and it is essential to prevent long term damage to health.”

In England, prescriptions for gluten-free food are not free of charge unless someone already qualifies for free prescriptions. Currently 67% of CCGs across the country adhere to the National Prescribing Guidelines, providing recommendations for GPs and policymakers on reasonable amounts of gluten-free staple foods such as bread, flour and pasta per patient per month.

“For someone medically diagnosed with coeliac disease there is no choice but to stick to a gluten-free diet, day in day out for life and so access to gluten-free staples is critical, and not as easy as you might think. The expansion of Free From aisles in large supermarkets masks the reality of very patchy provision. In particular, small stores and budget supermarkets have little, if any, gluten-free staples. What’s more, prices make such products unaffordable for some. Both these issues put those most in need at risk – those on a limited budget or with limited mobility,” continued Ms Sleet.

Ends

**Notes to editor**

- Coeliac disease is a serious illness where the body’s immune system reacts to gluten found in food, making the body attack itself.
- 1 in 100 people in the UK has coeliac disease
- A wide range of case studies are available on request from Coeliac UK.
- Average time to diagnosis is 13 years.
- 1 in 4 people diagnosed with coeliac disease had previously been diagnosed with IBS.
- Gluten is a protein found in wheat (including spelt), rye and barley. Some people are also sensitive to oats. Obvious sources of gluten include breads, pastas, flours, cereals, cakes and biscuits. It is often used as an ingredient in many favourite foods such as fish fingers, sausages, gravies, sauces and soy sauce.
- Coeliac UK has a Helpline on 0333 332 2033 and further information can be found at [www.coeliac.org.uk](http://www.coeliac.org.uk)

\* Comparative costs for gluten-free bread and gluten containing bread as of 20 April 2016

Gluten-free loaf	Price per 100g	Price per loaf
Tesco-free from white sliced (400g)	£0.38	£1.50
Tesco-free from fresh bread (550g) (white or brown)	£0.36	£2.00

Asda free from white sliced bread (400g)	£0.38	£1.50
Asda free from brown sliced bread (550g)	£0.27	£1.50
Sainsbury's free from sliced (400g) white or brown	£0.50	£2.00
Waitrose gluten-free bread (400g) white or brown	£0.57	£2.29

Compared to gluten containing

<b>Gluten containing loaf</b>	<b>Price per 100g</b>	<b>Price per loaf</b>
Tesco everyday value bread (800g) (white or brown)	£0.05	£0.40
Tesco bread (800g) (white or brown)	£0.06	£0.50
Asda Baker's Selection (800g) white or brown	£0.05	£0.36
Asda chosen by you (800g) white or brown	£0.07	£0.55
Sainsbury's basics bread (800g) white or brown	£0.05	£0.40
Sainsbury's bread (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.45
Waitrose essential (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.45
Waitrose bread (800g) white or wholegrain	£0.17	£1.34

Note: for Morrison customers there is not an own brand gluten-free version. Genius bread (gluten-free) is available at £2.83 for a 535g loaf (£0.53 per 100g) or Warburtons gluten-free is available at £3.00 for a 560g loaf (£0.54 per 100g)