

Green light for planet-friendly inhalers

NHS Grampian has introduced a traffic light system for GPs and other health care professionals highlighting the carbon footprint of inhalers.

Phil Mackie, consultant in public health for NHS Grampian who also leads on preventing harms to human health for Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership, explained: “We know planet health goes hand-in-hand with public health so we’re doing everything we can to find greener ways of delivering services.

“In primary care, inhalers account for a quarter of the carbon emissions associated with prescriptions. It is estimated that a patient using one of the commonly prescribed ‘blue’ inhalers releases the equivalent of 28kg of carbon – or running a car for 175 miles – from Aberdeen to Perth and back. Using a non-metered dose (powder or mist) inhaler alternative would produce the equivalent carbon of four miles travelled. So, you can see how the numbers quickly stack up!”

Patients with respiratory conditions may notice a difference in what’s offered when it comes to their regular respiratory review. There is no need to take action ahead of your normal appointments but if you would like to discuss the greenest option for you then please ask your medical practice.

Specialist Respiratory and Cystic Fibrosis Pharmacist, Alison Copland, who works at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI), plays a leading role in NHS Grampian’s dedicated Respiratory Managed Clinical Network, as well as feeding into a Scotland-wide respiratory pharmacist special interest group. She’s keen to highlight that the step towards greener prescribing isn’t just about the types of inhalers available.

Alison said: “We’ve updated our management and prescribing guidance to highlight the different types of inhaled therapies available and their carbon footprint, but the most important thing for everyone to remember is to please use the most appropriate medication for you.

“It’s far more environmentally friendly if you’re using the most appropriate medication for you effectively than switching to an alternative you can’t use appropriately or one that has a more detrimental impact on your health. GPs and respiratory nurses will give you the advice that’s right for you.”

Alison has been working in ARI within the respiratory department for 16 years and runs clinics for severe asthma patients, as well as working with colleagues to update prescribing guidance.

She added: “The over-use of short-acting beta-agonists (SABA) inhalers – the blue ones many people will be familiar with – is also an issue we’re working to address across the country. Guidance now suggests people with asthma who have been prescribed more than three of these per year should have their asthma reviewed by a healthcare professional as this is often a sign their asthma is not as well controlled as it should be.

“If you’re invited for your asthma/respiratory review, please prioritise it. The technology available to us is improving all the time and there may be a better way to meet your needs.”

Making sure you use your inhaler correctly is one of the best ways to help protect the environment. Find out more about how to use different inhalers: [How to use your inhaler \(dontwasteabreath.com\)](https://dontwasteabreath.com)

Read NHS Grampian’s Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy: [nhsgr-c-e-sustainability-strategy.pdf \(nhsgrampian.org\)](https://nhs.uk/grampian-climate-emergency-and-sustainability-strategy)

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Note to editor:

Photograph of Alison Copland at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary attached.

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