HEALTHY START

Briefing Paper for NHS Lanarkshire staff

Background

- Healthy Start replaces the Welfare Food Scheme (WFS), which was first brought in to combat food shortages during the Second World War.
- Like the WFS, Healthy Start will be a reserved social security benefits issue, with overall policy responsibility for the scheme resting with the Department of Health in London.
- Phase 1 of Healthy Start, which took place in Devon and Cornwall, allowed the operation of the processes underpinning the scheme – such as supplier registration/reimbursement, voucher exchange at point of sale, and beneficiary application procedures – to be fully monitored and evaluated before national roll-out could take place.
- Independent evaluation of Phase 1 indicated that the scheme had been implemented satisfactorily.
- Healthy Start will be launched nationally across the UK on 27th November 2006.

Who qualifies for Healthy Start?

- Healthy Start is open to pregnant women and families with children under the age of four who are on:
  - Income Support
  - Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance or
  - Child Tax Credit (but not Working Tax Credit) with an income below £14,155 a year.
- All pregnant women under the age of 18 also qualify, whether or not they are on benefits.
- Children aged four will continue to benefit from the provision of milk in nursery or day care (although further details have not yet been received).
- Existing WFS beneficiaries will automatically have their details transferred to Healthy Start – only new beneficiaries need to apply.

How do people get their vouchers?

- Application leaflets (order code HS01) are available from www.healthystart.nhs.uk or 08701 555 455.
- Health professionals such as midwives should have the application leaflet available for the first contact, for example a booking appointment, to encourage women to make their application early. Pregnant women can receive vouchers from the tenth week of pregnancy.
- Health professionals working with parents and carers of children under four years should also make the application leaflet available to encourage them to find out if they are eligible.
How does Healthy Start work?

- Once accepted on the scheme, pregnant women and families will receive a set of vouchers through the post every four weeks.
- Each voucher is worth £2.80 and can be exchanged for any combination of milk, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and infant formula milk in registered shops. Change will not be issued from a voucher so families should be encouraged to use all of the value of the voucher.
- Free vitamin supplements are also available.

How many vouchers do families get?

- Pregnant women and children aged between one and four will receive one voucher per week, worth £2.80, for each child/pregnancy.
- Babies under one year old will receive two vouchers, worth a total of £5.60.
- Babies who are born before the estimated date of delivery (EDD) will receive two vouchers until one year after their EDD.
- Babies who are born after the EDD will receive vouchers for one year from the date of delivery.

Role of health professionals

- Healthy Start is a tool for health professionals to help them identify pregnant women and families who may need extra help and support to breastfeed and to have a healthier lifestyle.
- Give appropriate health and lifestyle advice about diet in pregnancy, infant feeding, weaning and the benefits of milk, fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Encourage women to apply for Healthy Start and sign Part B of the application form.
- Role is not to check whether those asking for the application form to be signed are getting the qualifying benefits they claim to be getting. The Department of Health will do this.
- If families have questions on the use of their vouchers or have a change in circumstances, health professionals should direct them to the Healthy Start helpline 0845 607 6823. This telephone number is also on the back of vouchers.

Benefits of Healthy Start

- Improved nutritional choice – milk will still be retained as an important component of the scheme, but families will now have access to a range of other healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables.
- Better links with the health service – new registration process will enable beneficiaries to come into contact with health professionals and to receive nutritional advice as a routine part of the scheme.
- Increased support for breastfeeding – WFS does little to incentivise breastfeeding as the value of the benefit for breastfeeding mothers is lower than that received by mothers who have chosen to formula feed.
Healthy Start provides the opportunity to equalise the benefits and remove administrative barriers to the promotion of breastfeeding within the NHS.

**Involving Retailers**

- The Healthy Start Reimbursement Unit has invited individual retailers across Scotland (and the UK) to register for Healthy Start.
- Mapping techniques will be used to ensure there are sufficient participating retailers across all areas.
- The onus is on retailers to ensure their outlet is registered. Retailers are also responsible for ensuring they are correctly reimbursed. If staff receive enquiries from retailers they should direct them to the Healthy Start Reimbursement Unit on 08707 201 668 or [www.hsru.co.uk](http://www.hsru.co.uk)
- Information on the retailers, including pharmacies that have registered in Lanarkshire can be found on the website by typing in a local postcode ML1, ML2 etc. Staff should familiarise themselves with local registered retailers to enable them to share this information with families.

**Publicity Materials**

- An initial order for A4 posters (order code HS50) has been placed with the Department of Health in England and these should be displayed in all health centres, GP practices and pharmacies.
- An initial order for application leaflets (order code HS01) has also been placed for community midwives and health visitors and these will be distributed as soon as possible.
- Once the initial stock of application leaflets has been used, locality staff currently with responsibility for ordering resources should order further copies directly from the Department of Health on 08701 555 455 or online at [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk) Other resources for health professionals are available and should be ordered in the same way.
- The Scottish Executive will shortly be issuing every midwife and health visitor in Scotland with a Healthy Start information pack for health professionals (order code HS55).

**Withdrawal of Infant Formula from NHS Lanarkshire premises**

- Beneficiaries of the WFS received their last batch of milk/infant milk tokens at the end of October and notification of changes to the scheme. Beneficiaries have also been informed that they will be able to use their vouchers in a wider range of shops. Milk/infant milk tokens are valid for 4 weeks therefore by the 27th November it is unlikely that families will seek to exchange tokens for infant formula at NHS premises.
- **From the 27th November all NHS Lanarkshire premises should cease the sale of infant formula to the public regardless of the small amount of stock they may still have.**
- Managers should ensure that all health centre staff, including receptionists, are aware of this and can direct families to some of the local registered retailers.
Healthy Start website

The Healthy Start website is comprehensive and contains more detail on all aspects of the scheme. Health professionals, particularly midwives and health visitors should be aware of the scheme therefore should visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk

For additional information not available on the website, please contact:
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