

Prescribing of Insulin Pen Needles

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Introduction

When initiating patients on both an appropriate and cost-effective insulin and glucose meter, consideration must also be given to the choice of insulin pen needles that will be used to administer the insulin.

This document provides guidance for reviewing and switching patients to cost-effective needles (for insulin use) in line with national guidance.

In 2019 [NHS England](#) advised that **prescribers in primary care should only initiate insulin pen needles that cost <£5 per 100 needles for any patient with diabetes**. Since this recommendation the price of pen needles has continued to decrease.

Pen needles are available in a complete range of sizes from 4mm to 12mm.

The Forum for Injection Technique (FIT) UK recommends 4mm needle to be the safest pen needle for adults and children regardless of age, gender, and Body Mass Index (BMI). Using needles of a shorter length helps to prevent intramuscular injection of insulin.

For patients currently using longer pen needle lengths (8mm, 12mm), it is advisable to change to a shorter needle length (6mm or less) but only after discussion with a healthcare professional, to ensure the patient receives advice on the correct injection technique.

Key points

- All needles are for single use only, this should be emphasised when counselling patients.
- 4mm needles with the smallest diameter (higher gauge number) are suitable for patients with insulin doses less than 50 units.
- Shorter needles are suitable for all people regardless of their BMI; they may not require a lifted skin fold and insulin can be given at 90 degrees angle to the skin.
- For children and adolescents there is no clinical reason for using needles longer than 6mm
- IM injection of all human insulin must be avoided as this can result in unpredictable blood glucose levels and severe hypoglycaemia more information about administration available in [FITUK Guidance](#).
- Using needles of shorter length (6mm or less) helps to prevent inadvertent IM injection of insulin.
- Patients on needles longer than 5mm should be reviewed and changed to a shorter needle length if their insulin dose is less than 50 units.
- Patients with insulin doses above 50 units may require insulin needles of 6mm.
- If patients occasionally experience sharp pain on injection, they should be reassured that the needle may have touched a nerve ending which happens randomly and will not cause any damage.
- If leakage of insulin occurs with shorter needles, injection technique should be reviewed. The individual should count slowly to 10 seconds before withdrawing the needle. If doses of more than 60 units are to be given, the dose could be split and given at different sites.
- Advice regarding monitoring blood glucose levels following a change to a shorter needle should be given as well as using up any existing needles before changing to a shorter needle to reduce wastage.

Formulary Choice of Insulin Needles

To allow patients greater freedom in choosing their preferred needles, practices may prescribe any of the following 6mm or less insulin pen needles that has a price of less than £3.00 per 100 pack, as detailed in the Drug Tariff:

Formulary choice	Insulin Pen Needle	Price as per DT November 2024	4mm/31g	4mm/32g	5mm/31g	6mm/31g
1 st	Insupen Original	£2.49		Yes	Yes	Yes
2 nd	GlucorX CarePoint	£2.75	Yes		Yes	Yes
2 nd	Greenfine Pen needle	£2.75		Yes	Yes	Yes

Insulin pen needles are compatible with all major brands of insulin pens and GLP-1s. **Please note, Bydureon®, Ozempic® and Trulicity® contain the needle(s) therefore an additional needle prescription is not required.**

Safety Needle Devices

Safety needles which incorporate automatic safety locks are available but should not routinely be prescribed on FP10, except for the following restricted circumstances and for exceptional use:

- For patients who cannot self-administer and are known to have a blood borne virus (BBV) e.g. HIV, hepatitis, or who is known to be aggressive.
- School nursing staff to administer insulin injections to children whilst at school (i.e. primary school children). N.B. Standard pen needles can be used outside school.
- Where safety needles are being used to mitigate risk to employees of an organisation, these should not be prescribed on a FP10 but provided by the employee's organisation.

If safety needles are deemed clinically appropriate, the following safety needles are available and are most cost-effective to be prescribed (prices per pack).

Formulary choice	Insulin Pen Needle	Price as per the Drug Tariff November 2024	Size
1 st	Apollo ProShield	£9.95	5mm/30g
2 nd	GlucorX Safety Pen	£12.95	5mm/30g
2 nd	Microdot Max Safety	£12.89	5mm/30g

Safe Disposal of needles

- Ensure patients are educated about the safe disposal of needles and lancets via a sharps bin.
- Sharpsguard yellow 1litre / Sharpsafe yellow 1 litre are suitable for insulin needles and lancets and are available on FP10.
- How to dispose sharps bin.
 - [Bin waste advice - Peterborough City Council](#)
 - [Domestic clinical and hygiene waste - Cambridge City Council](#)
 - [Clinical Collections - East Cambridge](#)
 - [Clinical Waste - Huntingdon City Council](#)
 - [Clinical Waste - Fenland Council](#)
 - [Clinical waste - South Cambridge](#)

References

- [NHS England \(2019\) Items which should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs](#)
- [FIT UK. The UK Injection and Infusion Technique Recommendations, 5th Edition.](#)
- [PrescQIPP \(2015\) Bulletin 103: Insulin Needle](#)
- [NHS Business Service Authority, Drug Tariff June 2024](#)
- MIMS March 2020
- [TREND Diabetes. Best Practice Guideline to support Correct Injection Technique in Diabetes Care \(November 2019\)](#)
- [Safety needles | HCPA](#)
- [Pen-needles-guidance-NEL-v1 07.2023.pdf \(icb.nhs.uk\)](#)
- [Coventry and Warwick APC - Prescribing Guidance: Needles for Pre-Filled and Reusable Injector Pens for Subcutaneous](#)

Document ratification details

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