The Pan Mersey Area Prescribing Committee recommends that sunscreens must only be prescribed on the NHS for patients who fit the ACBS prescribing criteria.

**ACBS criteria**
- The Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) advises on specified conditions where certain substances may be regarded as drugs and may be prescribed on the NHS (1). Prescriptions issued in accordance with the Committee's advice and endorsed ‘ACBS’ will normally not be investigated.
- Sunscreens marked as “ACBS” in the British National Formulary (BNF) are regarded as drugs when prescribed for skin protection against UV radiation in photodermatosis (1).
- Photodermatoses are a group of skin conditions associated with abnormal reaction to UV radiation, predominantly UVA radiation (whereas UVB is predominantly responsible for sunburn). Photosensitive dermatoses: include polymorphic light eruption, actinic prurigo, chronic actinic dermatitis, solar urticaria, hydroa vacciniforme – certain drugs e.g. demeclocycline, phenothiazines, amiodarone can cause photosensitivity. Sunscreens should not be prescribed to patients who are taking a potentially photosensitising drug unless they actually experience drug-induced photosensitivity. Photoaggravated dermatoses: include cutaneous lupus erythematosus, dermatomyositis, herpes simplex, Darier’s disease, pellagra, some cases of rosacea and vitiligo (2).
- ACBS-marked sunscreens available in the Pan Mersey Formulary are listed [here](#).
- Other sunscreens must not be prescribed on the NHS, and no sunscreens should be prescribed where the ACBS criteria are not met.
- Examples of where prescribing sunscreens on the NHS is inappropriate include eczema, following surgery for skin cancers or where patients experience allergies to regular sunscreens.

**Patient factors**
For optimum photoprotection people with photodermatoses should use sunscreens from spring to autumn and apply them thickly and frequently (approximately two hourly). Prescribe sunscreen preparations with highest sun protection factor (SPF) to provide maximum protection, (protects against UVB) and 4 or 5 star rating (protects against UVA). Preparations with SPF less than 30 should not normally be prescribed (2). Advise any patients who don’t meet the ACBS approved indication to purchase an appropriate sunscreen. Remind patients that sunscreens are not a substitute for covering the skin and avoiding sunlight.

**Cost**
Current annual expenditure by NHS nationally is approximately £2,300 per 100,000 population; in Pan Mersey it is approximately £5,000 per 100,000 population (£80,000).

**References**
1) British National Formulary 72, Sept 2016 – March 2017