

For many people with multiple sclerosis (MS) struggling with spasticity—a painful stiffness or tightness of muscles—the promise of cannabis-based THC CBD sprays represents a tempting option. But if you’ve been told that “other treatments have not worked” and therefore you might be eligible for an NHS prescription of such a spray, what exactly does that phrase mean? How does it factor into NHS funding, legal prescribing, and specialist-only rules? And what’s changed since 2018’s rescheduling of these medicines?

In this post, I’ll unpack the key points around **MS spasticity THC CBD spray**, the **four-week trial** that NICE and NHS England recommend, and the thorny line between **legal prescribing** and **NHS funding**. Plus, I’ll highlight the role of unlicensed cannabis-based medicines and NHS caution in their use. If you’re considering your options, this article will help you understand what “other treatments have not worked” really means for getting hold of this medicine on the NHS.

Background: 2018 Rescheduling and What Changed

Before 2018, cannabis-based products were controlled substances in the UK and effectively off-limits to prescribing doctors—except in very rare cases. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) classified them as Schedule 1 drugs, meaning no recognised medical use.

However, changes in November 2018 rescheduled cannabis-based products for medicinal use to Schedule 2. This opened the door for specialist doctors to prescribe cannabis-based medicinal products (CBMPs) legally. The thicket of legal restrictions that deterred prescribing started to thin.

What did this mean practically? For MS spasticity, it meant that THC CBD sprays like *Sativex*® (nabiximols) became formally licenced and could be prescribed by specialists. Unlicensed cannabis-based medicines also gained a legal foothold but remain tightly regulated.

Quick translation for patients:

"Since 2018, doctors specialising in MS can legally prescribe cannabis sprays if they think it'll help, but they usually have to show you've tried other treatments first."

NHS Prescribing Criteria for MS Spasticity THC CBD Spray

The key phrase “**other treatments have not worked**” is a crucial criterion under NHS prescribing guidelines for MS spasticity sprays. It’s part of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance, which NHS England uses to decide eligibility for funding.

In NHS language, this phrase means you must have previously been treated with standard spasticity medications—such as baclofen, tizanidine or dantrolene—and found them insufficiently effective or intolerable due to side effects. Only then does the pathway open to consider THC CBD spray as an add-on therapy.

What does NHS England expect?

- A documented trial of first-line antispasticity treatments where possible, at an appropriate dose and duration.
- A specialist consultant neurologist or MS specialist recommending the THC CBD spray based on clinical judgement.
- An agreed plan to conduct a **four-week trial** of the spray to assess efficacy and tolerability.

This “four-week trial” is important: NICE recommends trying the spray for at least four weeks and stopping if no meaningful benefit is seen. The decision to fund longer-term treatment hinges on this assessment.

Patient-friendly summary

“The NHS wants to know you've tried and ‘failed’ standard medicines before, and then you get a trial period on the cannabis spray to see if it really helps you before they agree to continue paying for it.”

Legal Prescribing vs NHS Funding: What’s the Difference?

A big source of confusion is mixing up what’s legal for a doctor to prescribe with what the NHS will actually pay for. The 2018 rescheduling made prescribing cannabis-based medicines possible—but NHS funding decisions are separate and often stricter.

Aspect	Legal Prescribing	NHS Funding
Who can prescribe	Specialist doctors (e.g. neurologists, pain specialists)	Same—only specialists
Is prescribing allowed?	Yes, if specialist agrees it’s appropriate	Yes, but only if NHS criteria are met
Does NHS have to pay?	No—patient could be asked to pay privately	Only if NICE/NHS England criteria (like ‘other treatments failed’) are met
Cost to patient	Could be substantial if private	Usually free at point of care if funded by NHS

Therefore, a specialist can prescribe a THC CBD spray legally, but if the patient doesn't meet NHS criteria (such as documented failure of other treatments), the £ cost won't be covered. This explains why some patients turn to private clinics.

Specialist-Only Prescribing Rules

Another critical safeguard is that NHS cannabis-based medicines like the MS spasticity THC CBD spray can only be prescribed by specialists—not by general practitioners (GPs). This is to ensure appropriate assessment, monitoring, and safe use.



Guidance also states that the decision to start and, crucially, to continue treatment should remain with the specialist team. GPs may handle repeat prescriptions once stability is confirmed, but initiation and ongoing reviews are specialist-led.



For patients, this means that simply asking your GP won't typically be enough; a referral to a neurologist or MS specialist is almost always needed.

Unlicensed Cannabis-Based Medicines and NHS Caution

While the *Sativex*® THC CBD spray is licensed for MS spasticity and recognised by NICE, many other cannabis-based products remain unlicensed. This means their quality, efficacy, and safety evidence aren't subject to the same regulatory rigour.

NHS authorities and specialists are generally cautious about prescribing unlicensed cannabis medicines. They risk inconsistent formulations and less clear evidence of benefit. Because of this caution:

- NHS funding is rarely granted for unlicensed CBMPs for MS spasticity.
- Doctors tend to reserve unlicensed CBMPs for clinical trials or exceptional cases.
- Patients exploring unlicensed options usually turn to private prescriptions and clinics.

For those considering private options, websites like medicalcannabis.co.uk provide directories and clinics comparison tools that can help find licensed prescribers and trustworthy providers.

Resources and Next Steps

If you want to learn more about THC CBD spray for MS spasticity and the NHS criteria, a helpful explainer is available at releaf.co.uk. They break down medical cannabis treatment pathways in plain language.

Remember, the journey to getting a cannabis-based spray on the NHS usually begins with talking openly to your MS specialist about your symptoms and treatment history. Keeping a clear record of previous therapies and their effects can speed up assessments.

Summary: What 'Other Treatments Have Not Worked' Really Means

1. You need to have tried standard antispasticity drugs and found them ineffective or not tolerated.
2. A specialist must confirm this and recommend the THC CBD spray.

3. You'll usually undergo a four-week trial to see if the spray works for you.
4. If the trial's positive, NHS funding may continue; if not, it stops.
5. Private prescribing is possible but may be costly—look up trusted clinics at medicalcannabis.co.uk.
6. Prescribing cannabis-based medicines is legal post-2018, but NHS funding and specialist-only rules apply.

Important:

No specific prices for NHS-funded MS spasticity THC CBD [nabilone nhs](#) spray were stated in available sources. If you come across prices, be sure to check and quote them exactly with attribution.

Understanding these details means you won't be left confused by NHS jargon or a blanket phrase like "other treatments have not worked." It's about meeting clear clinical criteria that show you've explored standard options and now need something different.

Hopefully, this helps demystify your path to THC CBD spray treatment for MS spasticity.