

Health and healthcare

Last modified: 20 October 2022

This section provides advice on looking after yourself, as well as practical information on how to obtain medical treatment. It also explains international students' entitlement to free medical treatment under the UK state health system. It describes the different options such as [Accident & Emergency](#), [visiting your GP](#) and [hospital appointments](#).

To access health care in the UK, you need to [register with a GP](#) when you arrive. Your institution may provide information about how and where to do this locally.

Arriving in a new country is a very busy time for international students and there are a lot of changes to go through. In this type of situation, with all its stresses, you can find yourself paying less attention than usual to your health.

Existing health problems can also be made worse by the effects of adjusting to unfamiliar food, a different climate and the emotional strains of being away from home. It can be easy to concentrate on your studies and forget about taking care of yourself.

The accident and emergency department in hospitals is for emergencies only, if you are unsure you should call [NHS 111](#) first or visit your pharmacy, they will be able to advise you. If you are in Northern Ireland then you should only use the NHS 111 number if your call is about coronavirus, if it is not then call [Northern Ireland's out of hours service](#).

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How the UK medical system works

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[GP \(Doctor\) surgery or health centre](#)

This is your first point of contact for medical treatment. UK residents register with a Health Centre or GP's Surgery. Most illnesses and other problems can be treated by the GP, but if you need to see a specialist, the GP will refer you to an appropriate hospital department. As well as

consultations with a Doctor, most GP's Surgeries and Health Centres provide a range of community health services: for example vaccinations, women's health clinics, services for parents of young children, family planning, contraception and sexual health. GP Surgeries and Health Centres are normally open during the daytime and early evening. However, they normally have an answering-machine message about where you can get help when the Surgery or Health Centre is closed. Your local hospital may also have an NHS Walk-in Clinic.

See [Register with a GP](#) for more information.

Hospital

If your GP refers you to hospital for treatment, you will usually be given an appointment to see a consultant (specialist doctor). Depending on the medical problem, you may be treated as an in-patient (where you are admitted to a ward and stay there overnight or longer) or as an out-patient (where you visit the hospital for an appointment).

If you think you need to see a specialist, you should approach your GP first and ask her or him to refer you.

For information about whether you will have to pay hospital fees, see the information below for whichever part of the UK you are in.

Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department

Some (but not all) hospitals have Accident and Emergency departments. These departments are open 24 hours a day.

If you need immediate medical assistance (for example, because of an accident), telephone 999. The call is free including from mobile phones. An operator will ask you which emergency service you need (Fire, Police or Ambulance). For urgent medical assistance ask for the ambulance service. Be ready to tell the emergency services what has happened and exactly where you are, especially the street name.

Once you are connected to the Emergency Medical Dispatcher, she or he will ask you questions about the condition of the patient and may offer advice on what to do until the ambulance arrives. If the person is badly injured and needs to go to hospital, an ambulance will be dispatched to take the person to a hospital Accident and Emergency (A&E) department.

If you need urgent treatment, but you are well enough to travel, you should make your own way by bus or taxi to an Accident and Emergency (A&E) department, or ask a friend to take you.

There are no fees for Accident and Emergency services (as long as you are not admitted as an in-patient and do not access follow-up treatment), and you do not have to have paid the immigration health surcharge to use them.

Note: You should only use A&E Departments for emergency treatment for serious illness or injury.

If you feel unwell or have a minor injury, always consider these options before going to A&E:

- Self care – look after yourself at home with a well-stocked medicine cabinet
- Visit your local pharmacy (chemist) – for expert advice on common illnesses and the best medicines to treat them.
- Ring NHS 111 (or the out of hours service if you are in Northern Ireland and are not calling about coronavirus) – 24 hour helpline for medical help and advice. If you are not sure where to go for your illness or injury, ask them.
- Make an appointment with your GP (doctor) - for illnesses that just won't go away

England

Last modified: 20 October 2022

Treatment that is free for everyone

Some treatment provided by the UK's National Health Service (NHS) is free for everyone:

- accident and emergency services (but not follow-up treatment, or admission as an in-patient to hospital)
- family planning services
- diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections
- diagnosis and treatment of certain infectious diseases
- the Covid-19 vaccination is available to all international students aged 18 or over who are studying in the UK. The vaccine is free, and you will not need to pay. For more information on Covid-19 and your health, see [NHS UK](#) and [Public Health England](#).
- treatment of conditions caused by torture, female genital mutilation, domestic violence or sexual violence (provided you did not come to the UK for the specific purpose of seeking such treatment)
- some palliative care services
- compulsory psychiatric treatment or treatment that has been ordered by a court
- treatment in prison or immigration detention

For other treatment, there are fees for “overseas visitors”, including students, but in practice most students do not need to pay. You can see why most students do not need to pay in the next box.

Note that assisted conception services are treated differently, and are not covered by any of the information on this web page.

People who don't pay hospital fees

You will be exempt from paying these fees (you will not have to pay them) if you fall into one of the following groups (we have listed the most important groups, but there are some others too):

You paid the immigration health surcharge for your current period of immigration permission

If you have already reached the expiry date of your immigration permission, it is OK as long as you made an application for an immigration extension before your immigration permission ran out AND you are still waiting for a decision on your application (or if you have already been refused, then you have remained in the UK and are still within the period you are allowed in order to pursue an administrative review or appeal against the refusal) - this is sometimes referred to as a period of 'Section 3C leave'. You will not have to pay hospital fees during your 'Section 3C leave'.

You applied for your current period of immigration permission before the immigration health surcharge was introduced on 6 April 2015

You are only be protected in this way if the immigration application you made was one where the immigration health surcharge would have been relevant if it had been made on or after 6 April 2015. If you have already reached the expiry date of your immigration permission, it is OK as long as you made an application for an immigration extension before your immigration permission ran out AND you are still waiting for a decision on your application (or if you have already been refused, then you have remained in the UK and are still within the period you are allowed in order to pursue an administrative review or appeal against the refusal) - this is sometimes referred to as a period of 'Section 3C leave'. You will not have to pay hospital fees during your 'Section 3C leave'.

Babies born in the UK

Babies aged 3 months or less, who were born in the UK to a parent who is exempt from hospital fees in one of the two ways described above, and who have not left the UK since birth.

You have a right to hospital treatment free of charge because of European obligations

Read the Government's [information](#) about who this covers.

Apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) before you leave your home country, and remember to bring it with you to the UK. If you forget to apply for an EHIC, or if you lose your EHIC, then apply from the UK straightaway to the health authorities in your home country for a Provisional Replacement Certificate (PRC). The Provisional Replacement Certificate acts as a substitute for an EHIC. Find information about applying for EHICs and PRCs on the [Your Europe](#) website.

You are a British Overseas Territory citizen

You must be resident in the Falkland Islands.

You are a national (or in some cases a resident) of a country with a reciprocal health care agreement with the UK

But only if your hospital treatment is covered by the agreement. Most of the agreements are of limited use as they entitle you only to enough immediate medical treatment to allow you to return to your home country. The following countries have reciprocal health care agreements with the UK (note that this list does change over time, so you should check with your country that it is still included): Anguilla, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, British Virgin Islands, Falkland Islands, Faroe Islands, Gibraltar, Ireland, Isle of Man, Israel, Jersey, Kosovo, Montenegro, Montserrat, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, St Helena, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

You have been granted or have made an application for asylum, humanitarian protection or temporary protection in the UK

Or you are their dependant.

You are a child who is looked after by a local authority

Armed Forces

You are a member of the UK's regular or reserve armed forces (or in some cases their spouse, civil partner or child).

Level of hospital fees

If you are an 'overseas visitor' and are not in one of the groups who are exempt from paying fees, you will be charged a high rate for any hospital treatment you receive (150% of the usual 'tariff'). You should make sure you have private health insurance from the beginning of your stay.

The regulations

The regulations are '[The National Health Service \(Charges to Overseas Visitors\) Regulations 2015](#)' (Statutory Instrument 2015 No.238). These have been amended by [later regulations](#).

Scotland

Last modified: 20 October 2022

Immigration health surcharge

If you paid the immigration health surcharge for your current period of immigration permission then you will qualify for free NHS hospital treatment on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK, for the whole of the period shown on your biometric residence permit.

The Scottish Government confirmed this in a [letter](#) on 12 August 2015.

If you are in the UK as a part-time postgraduate Tier 4 student then this is how you will qualify for free NHS hospital treatment.

Full-time students

If you are a full-time student in the UK:

- You will qualify for free NHS hospital treatment on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK, from the beginning of your stay until (normally) one month after your course ends. However, the Scottish Government has assured UKCISA that if you have paid the immigration health surcharge then your entitlement will continue until your biometric residence permit expires. Please ask the International Student Adviser at your college or university to telephone UKCISA if you ever have a problem with this.

- Your spouse or civil partner (not unmarried partner) and children with you in the UK will also be entitled to free NHS hospital treatment. 'Children' in this context means under 16 (or under 19 if they are in full-time education).

Short-term students

If you are in the UK as a short-term student with 6 months' permission to be in the UK, then for any periods when you are not a full-time student you should take out private medical insurance.

If you are in the UK as a short-term student with 11 months' permission to be in the UK, then you will have paid the immigration health surcharge and so will qualify for free NHS hospital treatment on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK, for the whole of your stay.

Reciprocal Health Care Agreements

The UK has reciprocal health care agreements for the following people:

- Citizens of: New Zealand; and Gibraltar (but only if expected to stay in UK for a maximum of 30 days)
- Residents of: Anguilla; Australia; British Virgin Islands; Falkland Islands; Isle of Man (provided stay will not exceed 3 months); Jersey (provided stay will not exceed 3 months); Montserrat; St Helena (not Ascension Island or Tristan da Cunha); and Turks and Caicos Islands
- Insured persons of: Bosnia and Herzegovina; Kosovo; Macedonia; Montenegro; and Serbia

Please note that this list changes, as new arrangements are agreed, or existing agreements end.

If you are covered by a reciprocal health care agreement, you will be eligible for some free NHS hospital treatment. Reciprocal health care agreements generally cover free hospital treatment, the need for which arose during your stay, but in many cases do not cover treatment of an existing condition. Before you travel, you should seek advice from the health authorities in your home country about what treatment will be covered. You may still need to take out limited medical insurance.

EEA nationals

See the [Scottish Government's NHS Inform website](#) for information about your position.

Apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) before you leave your home country, and remember to bring it with you to the UK. If you forget to apply for an EHIC, or if you lose your EHIC, then apply from the UK straightaway to the health authorities in your home country for a Provisional Replacement Certificate (PRC). The Provisional Replacement Certificate acts as a substitute for an EHIC. Find information about applying for EHICs and PRCs on the [Your Europe](#) website.

Others

There are a number of other exemptions from fees for NHS hospital treatment which might help you if you do not qualify under the provision for students, for example for:

- those who have lived lawfully in the UK for a period of 12 months or more before the hospital treatment
- refugees and those granted Humanitarian Protection, Discretionary Leave or Exceptional Leave
- asylum seekers
- people engaging in employment or self-employment in the UK
- some spouses, civil partners and children of these people

If you are not in one of the eligible categories described on this page, you and your family are only entitled to limited free NHS hospital treatment. You will have free emergency hospital treatment, but only the treatment given in an NHS Accident and Emergency department is free of charge. Once you are admitted on to a ward or given an outpatient appointment, fees will apply. It is therefore very important that you take out medical insurance for the duration of your visit to the UK. Please note that private medical treatment is very expensive if you do not have medical insurance.

Treatment that is free for everyone

The following treatment provided by the UK's National Health Service (NHS) is free for absolutely everyone, there are no fees:

- accident and emergency services (but not follow-up treatment, or admission as an in-patient to hospital)
- family planning services
- diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections
- diagnosis and treatment of certain infectious diseases
- the Covid-19 vaccination is available to all international students aged 18 or over who are studying in the UK. The vaccine is free, and you will not need to pay. For more information on Covid-19 and your health, see [NHS UK](#) and [Health Protection Scotland](#)
- compulsory psychiatric treatment or treatment that has been ordered by a court

The regulations

The original regulations are '[The National Health Service \(Charges to Overseas Visitors\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 1989](#)' (Statutory Instrument 1989 No.364). You can search for the regulations on the [legislation.gov.uk](#) website.

The regulations have been amended a number of times since they were first made, so you will also need to search there for all the various regulations titled 'The National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations'.

This is the [letter](#) issued by the Scottish Government on 12 August 2015 confirming the position for people who have paid the immigration health surcharge.

Wales

You have paid the immigration health surcharge

If you paid the immigration health surcharge for your current period of immigration permission then you will qualify for free NHS hospital treatment on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK. This is stated on the Welsh Government's [wales.com](https://www.wales.com) website.

Courses of six months or more

If you are pursuing a full-time course which is at least six months long:

- You will qualify for free NHS hospital treatment from the beginning of your stay on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK.
- Your spouse or civil partner (not unmarried partner) and children with you in the UK will also be entitled to free NHS hospital treatment. To receive free hospital treatment, these family members must be in the UK as your dependants and not, for example, as visitors. 'Children' in this context means aged under 16 (or under 19 if they are in full-time education).

Courses of less than six months

If you are pursuing a full-time course which is less than six months long but it is substantially funded by the UK Government (this includes the National Assembly for Wales), you will receive free NHS hospital treatment from the beginning of your stay. 'Substantially' means at least 35% government funded. You will need to provide evidence of the funding in order to qualify for free treatment.

If you are not substantially funded in this way, and your course is less than six months long, you should take out private medical insurance for the duration of your visit to the UK (unless you have paid the immigration health surcharge). But first check you if you fall into one of the other eligible categories described on this page.

Reciprocal Health Care Agreements

The UK has reciprocal health care agreements for the following people:

- Citizens of: New Zealand; and Gibraltar (but only if expected to stay in UK for a maximum of 30 days)
- Residents of: Anguilla; Australia; British Virgin Islands; Falkland Islands; Isle of Man (provided stay will not exceed 3 months); Jersey (provided stay will not exceed 3 months); Montserrat; St Helena (not Ascension Island or Tristan da Cunha); and Turks and Caicos Islands
- Insured persons of: Bosnia and Herzegovina; Kosovo; Macedonia; Montenegro; and Serbia

Please note that this list changes, as new arrangements are agreed, or existing agreements end.

If you are covered by a reciprocal health care agreement, you will be eligible for some free NHS hospital treatment even if your course lasts less than six months. Reciprocal health care agreements generally cover free hospital treatment, the need for which arose during your stay, but in many cases do not cover treatment of an existing condition. Before you travel, you should seek advice from the health authorities in your home country about what treatment will be covered. You may still need to take out limited medical insurance.

EEA nationals

Look at [this health board's website](#) for information about the position for EEA nationals in Wales.

Apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) before you leave your home country, and remember to bring it with you to the UK. If you forget to apply for an EHIC, or if you lose your EHIC, then apply from the UK straightaway to the health authorities in your home country for a Provisional Replacement Certificate (PRC). The Provisional Replacement Certificate acts as a substitute for an EHIC. Find information about applying for EHICs and PRCs on the [Your Europe](#) website.

Others

There are a number of other exemptions from fees for NHS hospital treatment which might help you if you do not qualify under the provision for students, for example for:

- those who have lived lawfully in the UK for a period of 12 months or more before the hospital treatment
- refugees and those granted Humanitarian Protection, Discretionary Leave or Exceptional Leave
- asylum seekers
- people engaging in employment or self-employment in the UK
- some spouses, civil partners and children of these people

If you are not in one of the eligible categories described on this page, you and your family are only entitled to limited free NHS hospital treatment. You will have free emergency hospital treatment, but only the treatment given in an NHS Accident and Emergency department is free of charge. Once you are admitted on to a ward or given an outpatient appointment, fees will apply. It is therefore very important that you take out medical insurance for the duration of your visit to the UK. Please note that private medical treatment is very expensive if you do not have medical insurance.

Treatment that is free for everyone

The following treatment provided by the UK's National Health Service (NHS) is free for absolutely everyone, there are no fees:

- accident and emergency services (but not follow-up treatment, or admission as an in-patient to hospital)
- family planning services
- diagnosis of sexually transmitted infections
- treatment of certain infectious diseases
- the Covid-19 vaccination is available to all international students aged 18 or over who are studying in the UK. The vaccine is free, and you will not need to pay. For more information on Covid-19 and your health, see [NHS UK](#) and [Public Health Wales](#)
- compulsory psychiatric treatment or treatment that has been ordered by a court

The regulations

The original regulations are '[The National Health Service \(Charges to Overseas Visitors\) Regulations 1989](#)' (Statutory Instrument 1989 No.306). You can search for the regulations on the [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) website.

The regulations have been amended a number of times since they were first made, so you will also need to search there for all the various regulations titled 'The National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) (Amendment) Regulations' and 'The National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations'.

Northern Ireland

Last modified: 20 October 2022

[You have paid the immigration health surcharge](#)

If you paid the immigration health surcharge for your current period of immigration permission then you should be able to expect to qualify for free NHS hospital treatment on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK.

UKCISA is currently seeking confirmation of this from the Northern Ireland Executive.

[Courses of six months or more](#)

If you are pursuing a full-time course which is at least six months long:

- You will qualify for free NHS hospital treatment on the same basis as anyone who is ordinarily resident in the UK.
- Your spouse or civil partner (not unmarried partner) and children with you in the UK will also be entitled to free NHS hospital treatment. To receive free hospital treatment, these family members must be in the UK as your dependants and not, for example, as visitors. 'Children' in this context means under the age of 16 (or up to the age of approximately 19 if they are in full-time education).

[Courses of less than six months](#)

If you are pursuing a full-time course which is less than six months long but it is substantially funded by the UK government, the Northern Ireland departments, the Welsh Ministers or the Scottish Ministers, you will receive free NHS hospital treatment. 'Substantially' means at least 35% government funded. You will need to provide evidence of the funding in order to qualify for free treatment.

If you are not substantially funded in this way, and your course is less than six months long, you should take out private medical insurance for the duration of your visit to the UK (unless you have paid the immigration health surcharge). But first check if you fall into one of the other eligible categories described on this page.

[Reciprocal Health Care Agreements](#)

The UK has reciprocal health care agreements for the following people:

- Citizens of New Zealand; and Gibraltar (but only if expected to stay in UK for a maximum of 30 days)
- Residents of: Anguilla; Australia; British Virgin Islands; Falkland Islands; Isle of Man (provided stay will not exceed 3 months); Jersey (provided stay will not exceed 3 months); Montserrat; St Helena (not Ascension Island or Tristan da Cunha); and Turks and Caicos Islands
- Insured persons of: Bosnia and Herzegovina; Kosovo; Macedonia; Montenegro; and Serbia

Please note that this list changes, as new arrangements are agreed, or existing agreements end.

If you are covered by a reciprocal health care agreement, you will be eligible for some free NHS hospital treatment even if your course lasts less than six months. Reciprocal health care agreements generally cover free hospital treatment, the need for which arose during your stay, but in many cases do not cover treatment of an existing condition. Before you travel, you should seek advice from the health authorities in your home country about what treatment will be covered. You may still need to take out limited medical insurance.

EEA nationals

See the [government services website](#) for information about your position.

Apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) before you leave your home country, and remember to bring it with you to the UK. If you forget to apply for an EHIC, or if you lose your EHIC, then apply from the UK straightaway to the health authorities in your home country for a Provisional Replacement Certificate (PRC). The Provisional Replacement Certificate acts as a substitute for an EHIC. Find information about applying for EHICs and PRCs on the [Your Europe](#) website.

Others

There are a number of other exemptions from fees for NHS hospital treatment which might help you if you do not qualify under the provision for students, for example for:

- those who have lived lawfully in the UK for a period of 12 months or more before the hospital treatment
- refugees and those granted Humanitarian Protection, Discretionary Leave or Exceptional Leave
- asylum seekers
- people engaging in employment or self-employment in the UK
- some spouses, civil partners and children of these people

If you are not in one of the eligible categories described on this page, you and your family are only entitled to limited free NHS hospital treatment. You will have free emergency hospital treatment, but only the treatment given in an NHS Accident and Emergency department is free of charge. Once you are admitted on to a ward or given an outpatient appointment, fees will apply. It is therefore very important that you take out medical insurance for the duration of your visit to the UK. Please note that private medical treatment is very expensive if you do not have medical insurance.

Treatment that is free for everyone

The following treatment provided by the UK's National Health Service (NHS) is free for absolutely everyone, there are no fees:

- accident and emergency services (but not follow-up treatment, or admission as an in-patient to hospital)
- family planning services
- treatment of sexually transmitted infections
- treatment in respect of infection with HIV
- treatment of certain infectious diseases
- the Covid-19 vaccination is available to all international students aged 18 or over who are studying in the UK. The vaccine is free, and you will not need to pay. For more information on Covid-19 and your health, see [NHS UK](#) and [Public Health Agency Northern Ireland](#)
- compulsory psychiatric treatment or treatment that has been ordered by a court

The regulations

The regulations are the '[Provision of Health Services to Persons Not Ordinarily Resident Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#)' (Statutory Rules of Northern Ireland 2015 No.27).

Register with a GP

Last modified: 07 September 2016

When you arrive in the UK you should register with a local doctor as soon as you can. Do not wait until you are ill. Click on the information below to find out how to do this.

How to register with a local doctor ('GP', General Practitioner)

When you arrive at your place of study you should register with a local doctor ('GP', General Practitioner) as soon as possible. These doctors are trained and experienced in diagnosing a wide range of health problems. They are based in local offices (called 'GP Surgeries') or Health Centres. Do not wait until you are ill. If your institution has its own Health Centre, you may be able to register there. Otherwise, you should register with any doctor close to where you live. See these lists of local doctors in each country:

[England](#)

[Scotland](#)

[Wales](#)

[Northern Ireland](#)

or from your local authority or Post Office.

To register, you will need to visit the doctor's surgery or clinic during consulting hours, taking a letter from your institution as proof that you are a student, along with your passport and any loose immigration documents. You should ask to be added to the list of National Health Service (NHS) patients. This means you will not have to pay a fee to visit the doctor. Most doctors' surgeries have female as well as male doctors, and if you prefer you can ask to be put on a woman doctor's list. If you only want to be seen by a woman doctor, you may need to say so whenever you make an

appointment.

To avoid paying the full (private) cost of treatment make sure the doctor knows you want treatment from the NHS.

Who can register?

Doctors in England, Wales and Scotland normally accept students who are on courses of any duration onto their lists of NHS patients. They do not apply the same tests that determine whether or not you can have free hospital treatment.

Doctors in Northern Ireland normally accept onto their lists of NHS patients students on courses of at least six months' duration. They also accept students on shorter courses who are substantially funded by the UK Government, the Northern Ireland departments, or the Welsh or Scottish Ministers.

Make sure that if you are entitled to a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) you obtain one before coming to the UK, and show it to the GP.

If the doctor accepts you as a patient you will be sent a medical card through the post with your NHS number. However, being registered with a GP (doctor), and having an NHS number, does not give you automatic entitlement to free hospital treatment. The hospital providing treatment is responsible for establishing whether international students are entitled to free hospital treatment.

If the doctor does not accept you as a patient, try elsewhere or contact:

[England: the local Primary Care Trust](#)

[Scotland: the NHS Board](#)

[Wales: the Local Health Board](#)

[Northern Ireland: the Business Services Organisation](#)

or alternatively you can obtain their contact details from the doctor or the Post Office.

Appointments with a doctor

Under the NHS, appointments with doctors are free (except for certain things such as vaccinations for travel or getting a sickness certificate). Ask whether or not you have to make an appointment to see the doctor, and remember to arrive on time for any appointment you make. It is very unusual for a doctor to agree to visit you at home in an emergency.

Prescriptions, Dentists, Opticians

Last modified: 15 September 2017

Prescriptions

If a doctor recommends a medicine, they may write a prescription for you. The prescription authorises a pharmacist to give you a particular medicine. Some medicines are available only with a prescription. You can get the medicine from the pharmacy counter at chemist's shops, or in the pharmacy department of larger shops and supermarkets.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

In Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, prescriptions are free of charge in most cases.

England

In England, most people need to pay for prescriptions, except the following people who have free prescriptions:

- aged under 19 and studying full-time;
- aged 60 or over;
- pregnant, or have had a baby within the last 12 months and have a valid exemption certificate;
- with a listed medical condition and an exemption certificate.

In England your children can get free prescriptions if they are under 16, or under 19 and studying full-time. You may also be able to get free or reduced cost prescriptions on the grounds of low income. For further information on this, see the [NHS website](#).

Dental treatment

You should try to have your teeth checked by a dentist at least once a year.

You can find lists of dentists who give NHS treatment at local main post offices or at:

- [England](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Wales](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)

You should ask the dentist whether they accept National Health Service (NHS) patients - many do not. The dentist may wish to conduct the same process for checking your entitlement to NHS care as a [General Practitioner \(GP\)](#) would. If you already have a GP, then the dental practice should contact the GP to ensure that they have undertaken an entitlement check. If accepted by the dentist as an NHS patient, you will need to give the dentist the NHS number on your medical card.

If you are entitled to NHS treatment, you may still have to make a contribution towards the cost of your dental treatment. If you are not entitled to NHS treatment, or the dentist you choose does not take NHS patients (some dentists will only accept private patients), you will have to pay for the full cost of your treatment.

You may be able to get free dental treatment from dental students at a teaching hospital. This applies even if you are not entitled to NHS treatment.

In Scotland, all full-time students are entitled to free initial dental checks.

If you are eligible for free prescriptions, you will also be eligible for free dental treatment.

Eye tests and eye care

Eye care is provided by opticians who usually operate from high street shops. You will normally have to pay a minimum charge for an eye test on the NHS (around £20) unless you are under 19 and in full-time study. If the test shows you need glasses or contact lenses, the optician will give you a prescription. The cost of frames and lenses varies considerably. You can apply for help with the cost of your eye test and glasses or contact lenses on the basis of low income in the same way as for prescriptions and dental treatment.

In Scotland, initial sight tests are free.

[Claiming help towards health costs](#)

For information on claiming help towards NHS prescriptions, dental charges and optical costs, you should read the detailed guidance relating to the various countries of the UK.

England

[General guidance about health costs](#)

[Specific information about prescription costs](#)

Wales

[General guidance](#) and [Prescriptions](#)

Scotland

[General guidance](#)

Northern Ireland

[General guidance](#) and [Prescriptions](#)

[“No recourse to public funds”](#)

Health benefits are not classed as ‘public funds’, so your immigration status will not be affected if you claim and receive any help with your health costs.

Specific health issues

Last modified: 30 September 2022

[Family planning](#)

Family Planning Clinics offer free, confidential advice and information on contraception (birth control) and sexual health. They provide free condoms and other contraceptives, pregnancy tests and cervical smear tests. Their services are completely confidential and they will not pass on information about you to anyone else.

Clinics can be used by all adults and young people (including those under 16 years of age), not just women. You can refer yourself or be referred by your GP or other health workers. You may need to

book an appointment to see the doctor but many centres also have walk-in clinics.

You can get details of your nearest Family Planning Clinic on the [NHS website](#), your GP surgery, hospital, local health authority or from the website of the Family Planning Association (FPA) at www.fpa.org.uk.

There are no fees for Family Planning Clinics, and you do not have to have paid the immigration health surcharge to use them.

Alternative medicine

Many towns in Britain have clinics providing homeopathy, herbal medicine, osteopathy, acupuncture, aromatherapy etc. These kinds of treatment are not usually available on the NHS, though your GP may be able to put you in touch with local facilities; or you can contact the Institute for Complementary and Natural Medicine (see [Addresses and Contacts](#)).

British weather

The British weather is unpredictable, but generally the coldest daytime temperatures are in the period from November to February and are between 2°C and 9°C. The climate can seem harsh, and wet or windy weather will make it seem even colder. A good way of keeping warm is by layering your clothes – wearing T-shirts or shirts under a woollen jumper, with a warm jacket or coat over the top, depending on how cold it is. You may also want to buy thermal underwear. A waterproof coat, an umbrella and strong shoes are useful in the rain.

Most of these things may be cheaper to buy in Britain, so check first with your institution on the comparative costs, but you need to arrive with enough warm clothes for your first few days.

Try to ensure that the rooms you live and work in are warm enough, and that you have plenty of bedding at night. Not all buildings have double glazing or central heating, and dampness can make you feel colder. On the other hand, be careful not to keep your room too hot, as gas and electricity can be expensive - and it will feel even colder when you do go out.

If your clothes do get wet, make sure you dry them out thoroughly before you wear them again.

Healthy eating

Eating the right food, and enough of it, is vital for keeping warm and healthy. If you are living in a catered hall of residence you will probably be given a balanced diet, but you should still be careful to make sure that you eat enough fresh fruit and vegetables. If you have special dietary requirements (for example, for religious or cultural reasons) make sure the catering authorities know about them.

If you are cooking for yourself, eating healthily can be more difficult, especially if preparing your own meals is new to you. Most big towns have stores or areas where you can buy food from different parts of the world, so you may be able to find food that is familiar.

A healthy diet is one which includes elements from all the main food groups (protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals). You should try to eat something from each of the following groups every day:

- bread, rice, pasta or cereals

- milk, cheese, yoghurt
- fresh fruit and vegetables
- meat, fish, eggs, lentils, nuts or beans

It can be fun experimenting with new and different types of food if you have the time, and cooking does not have to be expensive. Food costs vary. As a rule, supermarkets will be cheaper than the corner shop, and street markets will be cheaper than supermarkets. Vegetables that are in season (that is, grown locally and available without being stored or imported) are usually a cheap source of food.

When preparing food, keep in mind that it is important to take some simple steps to avoid food poisoning (caused by different sorts of bacteria):

- put chilled and frozen food in the fridge or freezer as soon as possible
- prepare and store raw and cooked food separately
- make sure the coldest part of the fridge is below 5°C
- use food before the 'use by' date
- keep animals away from food
- always wash your hands thoroughly before preparing food and especially after going to the toilet
- keep your kitchen clean
- defrost and cook food thoroughly especially eggs, poultry and meat.

If sometimes you do not have the time or inclination to cook for yourself, a meal at your institution or student union refectory will probably be the cheapest alternative. Restaurants can be expensive, although local cafes can be good value for money.

Sexual health

British attitudes to sex may be different from those in your own country. It is often accepted that people who are involved in a relationship may have sex together. Of course, the choice is a personal one. You are entirely free to live according to your personal standards and should not feel pressured to adopt those of your fellow students. You can find more information and advice about sexual health on the [NHS website](#).

Contraception

You can get advice on contraception from your doctor, or from a local Family Planning Clinic (FPC). Your institution's welfare service will have details of where to go.

Using a condom as a form of contraception can prevent pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases between partners. Condoms can easily be bought from chemists, public toilets, supermarkets, petrol stations and online.

If you're having sex with new or casual partners, regular sexually transmitted infections (STI) testing is essential for your overall health and wellbeing. STI testing is free, you don't need to pay. You can use online self-sampling services or find a local sexual health service on the [NHS website](#).

HIV/AIDS

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency Virus), which can affect the body's normal defence against illness. The virus is passed on by an exchange of body fluids, through unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected partner (of the same or the opposite sex), by sharing needles and drug injecting equipment, and from an infected pregnant woman to her child. Using a condom can reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS in sexual intercourse. Some people carry HIV for a number of years without developing AIDS or showing symptoms.

You are not at risk from HIV/AIDS from: sharing food, drinks, clothes, crockery or toilet seats; shaking hands; coughing, sneezing or day to day contact with an infected person. If you are concerned about the risks of AIDS, or want to talk confidentially, you can contact the telephone helpline at the [Terence Higgins Trust](#).

Treatment for HIV/AIDS is usually free, even if you would not normally be entitled to free NHS hospital treatment.

[Meningitis \(and septicaemia\)](#)

Meningitis is an illness caused by bacteria or viruses. Whilst viral meningitis can be very nasty it is almost never life-threatening and most people will soon make a full recovery. Bacterial meningitis is more serious and most cases are caused by meningococcal bacteria. These bacteria also cause septicaemia, the blood poisoning and far more threatening form of the disease. The illness tends to affect children and young adults and you may hear of cases amongst students.

Students on higher education courses in the UK are likely to be offered a meningitis vaccination when they start their course. The vaccination protects against one of the common strains of the disease, but does not protect against all strains of the illness.

Most institutions and GP surgeries have information about how to recognise the symptoms of meningitis. There has been a concerted effort in recent years to make students aware of this illness. When detected early it can be effectively treated, but if allowed to develop it can be fatal. Read any information you are given about meningitis carefully so that you know what to look out for and what to do if you suspect that someone you know may have the illness.

Even if you are not otherwise entitled to free NHS hospital treatment, any treatment for meningitis will be free of charge.

[The 'common cold'](#)

The common cold is caused by a virus that irritates the nose and throat, causing sneezing and coughing. It is a very common illness in the winter months. There is no effective cure for the common cold. However, getting plenty of rest, and drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids and fruit juices, will aid recovery. A cold will usually pass after a few days. However, if symptoms get worse, or the cold lasts for a long time, you should consult your GP.

Many British people continue to work or attend classes when they have a cold. You may recover more quickly, and reduce the risk of passing on the virus to fellow students, if you stay in bed and do not attend classes until you are feeling better - but don't forget to tell your tutor or the institution that you are ill.

NHS Debt and Immigration

Last modified: 24 September 2015

Since October 2011, the immigration rules have included provisions to refuse immigration applications by some people, if they have an outstanding unpaid invoice for NHS treatment.

See our information about [General grounds for refusal](#)

Insurance

Last modified: 09 February 2016

Even if you are entitled to free NHS treatment whilst in the UK, you should consider taking out insurance which covers other medical-related costs. An insurance policy may cover, for example:

- lost fees if you are unable to complete your course;
- costs of returning home if a relative is ill;
- costs of a relative visiting you in the UK if you fall ill;
- cost of returning to your home country for treatment;
- or in the worst possible situation, returning a body home for burial.

There is often a long wait for NHS treatment, sometimes many months. An insurance policy which gives you access to private medical care could give you much quicker access to the treatment you need.

If you already have medical insurance in your home country, check whether you can extend it to cover your stay in the UK, as well as looking at options available from UK insurers.

Addresses and contacts

Last modified: 04 September 2015

[National Health Service \(NHS\)](#)

NHS website: www.nhs.uk

For medical advice when your GP surgery is closed:

Tel: 111 (free from mobiles and landlines, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; tell the operator if you need an interpreter)

Next Generation Text/Text Relay: 18001 111 (for the deaf and hard of hearing, or those who have difficulties communicating)

In Northern Ireland:

Use the numbers for 111 given above if your call is about coronavirus

If your call is not about coronavirus then contact [Northern Ireland's out of hours service](#)

[Other contacts](#)

Complementary and Natural Medicine

[The ICNM](#) has a database of registered alternative medicine practitioners throughout the UK.

ICNM, Can-Mezzanine, 32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH

Tel: 020 7922 7980

Fax: 020 7922 7981

Email: info@icnm.org.uk

HIV and AIDS

The [Terence Higgins Trust](#) offers help and counselling to people with HIV and AIDS, their relatives and friends.

Adviser telephone helpline: 0808 802 1221

Meningitis

[Meningitis Research Foundation](#) has a 24 Hour meningitis helpline: Tel: 0808 800 3344 (freephone) - operated by trained staff and nurses 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

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