

# How to access medical care in your community as an asylum seeker

## Your healthcare rights

**Most healthcare in the UK is provided by the National Health Service (NHS).**

**Asylum seekers in the UK have the same rights to free NHS healthcare as UK citizens.**

This includes:

- seeing a doctor or nurse
- going to hospital
- having tests
- receiving care for your mental health
- calling and using an ambulance.

If you have been refused asylum and do not have an active appeal, there might be limits to the free care you can receive (see Refused Asylum Seekers below).

You have the right to an interpreter who will translate into your language. Do not be afraid to ask for an interpreter when you get medical care. This will help you and the people looking after you to understand each other properly.

You have the right to confidentiality. This means that your medical details will not be shared outside the medical team treating you without your agreement unless they are worried that you or another person is in serious danger or if a serious crime has been committed.

The NHS may sometimes share your name, address, and date of birth with the Home Office in some circumstances, for example if they are trying to find out if you are entitled to free hospital care.

## Refused asylum seekers (England only)

If your asylum claim has been refused and you do not have an active appeal there may be limits to the free healthcare you are entitled to receive in England. This mostly affects hospitals or specialist care. You will still have the right to some free healthcare, including:

- seeing and being treated by a general practitioner (GP)
- free contraception
- free emergency care in Accident and Emergency (A&E) or urgent care centres
- free tests and treatment for infectious diseases, including coronavirus
- free immunisation against coronavirus.

If you live in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, you have the right to free hospital and specialist care even if your claim has been refused.

You can find more information about your entitlement to healthcare after a refused claim here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/11cKMCy08ebN-IJQsP1jvsTcSfwC6YeE8FYrmAZCoZ1w/edit>.

## Registering with a GP

Everybody who lives in the UK (no matter what their immigration status is) can register with a general practitioner (GP) clinic in the area where they live. People in the UK often call a GP clinic a “practice” or a “surgery”.

You can find a GP near you using <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp>. This is only for GPs in England.

GPs treat most non-emergency physical and mental health problems. They work with nurses and other health professionals and can send you to see a specialist doctor if you need one.

To register with a GP you should telephone them or go to the clinic reception desk and ask for a registration form. The GP clinic will ask for your address because each clinic has a particular area they look after. They may ask for identification documents and proof of your address, but you can still register if you do not have these.

**You have the right to register with a GP even if you have no documents or no permanent address. You can ask the GP clinic to register you using the clinic's address or the address of a friend or community centre.**

If you having problems registering with a GP clinic, please show receptionist the below letter.

**Dear GP Receptionist,**

**I would like to register with your clinic. Thank you for helping me do this. NHS guidelines say that I have the right to register even if I do not have documents or proof of address.**

**If I do not have a permanent address, I still have the right to register. You can register me as having "no fixed abode", at the clinic address, at a friend's address or a community centre.**

**If I can not register at your practice, please write down the reason for me.**

**If you need more information, please see <https://assets.nhs.uk/prod/documents/how-to-register-with-a-gp-asylum-seekers-and-refugees.pdf>**

## **Booking a GP appointment**

If you need to see your GP about a health problem, you should telephone the GP clinic and speak to the receptionist. They might ask you the reason for your call to help them arrange for the right person to call you back. If you need an interpreter, ask the receptionist when you call and tell them which language you need. Currently most appointments are by telephone or video call because of the coronavirus, so someone will call you back.

There may be other ways to contact your GP, such as by email, through the clinic's website, or by going directly to the GP clinic. There may also be other places you can go for medical care, such as urgent care centres, walk-in centres and minor injury clinics. This will depend on what is available in your area. If you live in England, you can find medical services near you using this website: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search>.

## **Getting medication**

If your GP thinks you need medication, they will give you a prescription for this. You can take this to be filled at any pharmacy. If you need long-term medication you will need to request a new prescription from your GP before you run out. It can take time to get a new prescription, so ask for your prescription at least a week before you need it.

In England, some people have to pay for their prescription medication. Asylum seekers can usually get medications free of charge, but you will need an HC2 certificate to show that you are entitled to free prescriptions (see below for more information on HC2). In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, prescription medications are free for everybody.

Some medications, such as antidepressants, can make you feel unwell if you stop taking them suddenly, so you should make sure that you do not run out of your medication or stop taking it unless a doctor tells you to.

If you are having problems getting medications that you need, you could call the free NHS advice telephone number 111 to ask for help (see below). Pharmacists can also help you get an emergency supply of some medications, such as asthma inhalers, if you run out.

It is a good idea to keep the boxes of your most recent medication or take photos of them (including the label with your name on) in case you need to show someone what medication you usually take. Doctors might not be able to prescribe some types of medication unless they have proof that you usually take it.

## The 111 service

The 111 service is a free health advice telephone service. You can call them for help with any non-emergency health issue on the number 111. (For emergencies, call 999.) The 111 service will ask you a lot of questions to decide what sort of help you need. They will then either give you advice or get someone to call you back to give you help.

If you have dental problems, the 111 service can tell you how to get treatment.

If you need help in another language, say the word “interpreter” and the language you need, then stay on the line and they will get a telephone interpreter to help with the call.

You can also use the 111 website (<https://111.nhs.uk>) if you prefer. You can write down what your problem is in English and someone will call you back. To access an interpreter, you need to call 111.

## Pharmacies

Pharmacies can sell you certain medications, such as painkillers or creams, without a prescription. They can also give you medical advice or treatment for some straightforward health problems. If you run out of a certain medication, for example asthma inhalers, pharmacists can help you get an emergency supply.

## Help with healthcare costs

If you are receiving support from the Home Office, you should have been given an HC2 certificate. An HC2 certificate allows you to get free prescriptions, eye tests and dental care. It also means you can get help with travel costs for some hospital appointments.

If you have not been given an HC2 certificate or if you need a replacement because you have lost your certificate or it has expired, you should ask for an HC1 form at your GP clinic or at a pharmacy. HC1 is the form you need to get a replacement for an HC2 certificate. You can order an HC2 certificate over the telephone by calling 0300 330 1343 or online at: <https://services.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/apply-for-help-with-nhs-costs/apply-online>.

## Coronavirus

The most common symptoms of the coronavirus are a new cough, loss or change in sense of taste or smell, and a fever. If you have one or more of these symptoms of coronavirus, you should stay at home and call 119 to ask for a test. If you say “interpreter” and the language you need, they will get a telephone interpreter to help with the call. You can also book a test online at: <https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test>.

Currently, you need to be registered with a GP to be invited for the coronavirus vaccine. The coronavirus vaccine is effective and safe.

Doctors of the World have produced leaflets about the vaccine in many languages, available at: <https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/coronavirus-vaccine-information>.

The NHS has produced videos about the vaccine in many different languages, available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/london/our-work/covid-19-vaccine-communication-materials>.

## Emergencies

A&E is for serious injuries and medical emergencies. For example, people might go to A&E if they think they have broken a bone, have chest pain or feel suicidal. You do not need an appointment to go to A&E, but you will have to wait to be seen (unless your problem is life threatening).

If you need an ambulance to come to you because there is an emergency (usually if your life or someone else’s life is in danger), you should call 999. It is free to call the 999 number. When you call, you will be asked “Which service do you require?” You should say “ambulance” (or police or fire for other kinds of emergency). You will be asked where you are, what your phone number is and what has happened. Stay on the telephone until they end the call because they might need to give you advice or ask more questions while you wait for the ambulance to arrive.

## Mental health problems

GPs can prescribe you medication for mental health problems and can refer you for talking treatments or to see a mental health specialist. If you are prescribed medication for mental health problems, it is important that you keep taking it unless your doctor tells you to stop.

If you are having problems due to past trauma or torture, such as nightmares or distressing memories, ask your GP to refer you for treatment for this. This might be a local mental health team, a trauma service or a charity, such as Freedom from Torture ([www.freedomfromtorture.org](http://www.freedomfromtorture.org)) or the Helen Bamber Foundation ([www.helenbamber.org](http://www.helenbamber.org)).

Mind is a mental health charity which has a telephone information service. You can call them to find out more about mental health problems and where to get help. Their number is 0300 123 3393 and the line is open from 9am-6pm Monday to Friday. You can ask them for an interpreter when you call. Your telephone provider will charge you to call their number, but you can also email them at [info@mind.org.uk](mailto:info@mind.org.uk).

If you feel that your mental health has got worse and you need urgent help, call your GP, 111 or your current mental health service if you have one. If you cannot get hold of them, go to A&E.

## Problems getting medical care

A GP can only refuse to register you if their patient list is full or you live outside their area. If this happens you should try to register at another clinic near where you live.

If you are having problems registering with a GP or if you are having other problems accessing medical care, you can contact Migrant Help on 0808 8010 503 or Health Watch on 03000 683 000.

The Health Watch website ([www.healthwatch.co.uk](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk)) has advice in many different languages. There may also be refugee or asylum support groups or charities in your area who can help you.

Doctors of the World has a clinical advice line, which gives free healthcare advice to people regardless of their immigration status. The free phone number is 0808 1647 686. The clinic is open from 10am to 12pm, Monday to Friday. They provide interpreters for people who need them.

## On the move checklist

Here are some things to remember if you are moving to accommodation in a new area:

- Take your medication, the boxes the medication came in, any medical letters and your HC2 certificate with you.
- Keep photos of these things on your phone as a back-up.
- As soon as you can after you move, register with a GP. Do not wait until you need an appointment or medication before registering with a GP.
- Keep the name and address of your GP on your phone.
- If you know your NHS number (a 10-digit number which is usually on letters from the NHS) keep this on your phone as it will help new doctors access your medical records.
- Find out where the nearest A&E and other walk-in health centres are in the area you have moved into.

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