

This booklet answers the questions you may have about registering with your local GP

Why you should register with your local GP?

NHS Lothian



Do you have difficulty understanding the English language?

If you have a problem reading or understanding the English language, this document is available in a language of your choice. Please ask an English speaking friend or relative to phone, write or email Lesley Boyd, Equality and Diversity Manager, NHS Lothian. Her contact details are:

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NHS Lothian would like to acknowledge NHS Grampian help and guidance in producing this booklet

Do you have a visual impairment?

This document is also available in large print and in other formats upon request

This booklet answers the questions:

- What is the National Health Service (NHS)?
- What is a General Medical Practitioner (GP)?
- What services do GPs provide?
- Why should I register with a GP?
- How do I register?
- Will I be able to communicate with my GP if I speak little or no English?
- How do I get to see my GP?
- What if I need non-emergency health care when my GP surgery or health centre is closed?
- Do I and my family qualify for free NHS health care?
- What if I need emergency health care?

What is the National Health Service (NHS)?

The National Health Service, known as the “NHS” is a state run national health service which provides free health care in the UK for UK nationals and citizens from other countries who also qualify for free health care in the UK. Details of who qualifies for free NHS health care are shown in the “Do I and my family qualify for free NHS health care?” on page 6.

The NHS is funded by taxation. It comprises General Practitioner services of:

- General Medical Practitioners (GP)
- General Dental Practitioners
- General Ophthalmic Practitioners
- General Pharmaceutical Practitioners

and community based services and hospital services, which are provided in every area.

What is a General Medical Practitioner (GP)?

A GP is your local personal NHS doctor. If you are ill or worried about your health or the health of anyone in your family, you should go and see your local GP. The place where you go to see your GP is called either a surgery or a health centre. GPs often work together in a small group called a practice. The benefit of GPs working in small groups is that if for any reason your own GP is not available, you may ask to see another GP in the same practice.

Many practices have both male and female GPs. If your faith, religion or culture requires that you or a member of your family are treated by a GP of the same sex, please let the GP receptionist know this when you first go to register.

Most surgeries and health centres are accessible by wheelchair, have doors that open electronically and have toilet facilities designed to meet the needs of disabled patients.

What services do GPs provide?

GPs are usually the first medical point of contact with the NHS. They are responsible for the comprehensive and continuing care of patients registered with them. GPs provide advice and treatment. If further treatment or investigation of a problem is required, the GP will co-ordinate this and ensure that it is provided. Further treatment might be provided by your GP, or by a member of their team such as a practice nurse, midwife or health visitor, or if required, by referral to a specialist doctor called a consultant or to other specialist services.

GPs are also keen to promote good health amongst their patients. They and their staff give advice on diet, exercise, healthy living and disease prevention.

Most patients are looked after by the same GP for many years. This builds up a bond of trust between the GP and patient and enables the GP to build up a good knowledge of you and your health care needs.

Why should I register with a GP?

By asking to register with your local GP, you are simply asking your local GP to be responsible for your ongoing medical care. If you are accepted, the GP is confirming that he or she will accept this responsibility. You will then know where to go for local medical care.

If for any reason, no GP in your local practice is able to accept your registration, you can approach other GP practices within your area.

How do I register?

First, locate your nearest GP practice. If you are unsure where this is, a full list of GP surgeries in your area is available from Primary Care on 013 537 8488. Details of GP practices are also available on our website www.nhsllothian.scot.nhs.uk. You can telephone the GP practice to find out when would be a good date and time for you to go along and register. If you are non-English speaking then get English speaking friend/relative to do this for you. The person making the call for you should also advise the practice staff if you are non-English speaking and what your main language is.

When you visit you should take with you details of:

- NHS medical card (applicable to UK residents only)
- Birth Certificate
- Photographic ID (passport, ID card or driving licence only)
- Proof of address - even if this is temporary – (mortgage/rental agreement, utility bill within last 6 months, bank statement, current employment documents)
- Your passport or other evidence of your free entitlement to NHS health care, for example your European Health Insurance Card, or if you are an asylum seeker or a refugee your HC2 certificate and ARC card. If you are unsure whether you and your family are entitled to free NHS health care, please see the “Do I and my family qualify for free NHS health care? on pages 6-11 which provides guidance
- Any health records you may have such as vaccination records or immunisation records

If you are also registering other members of your family, you should also take along the same information for them.

At the surgery or health centre, the GP receptionist will fill out a registration form with you and then you are registered. A similar form will be filled out for each member of your family you wish to register.

Will I be able to communicate with my GP if I speak little or no English?

Providing that you inform the practice prior to your appointment that you will require an Interpretation and Translator Service, this will be arranged by the practice in advance of your visit. On booking your appointment you should advise the practice which language it is you require.

Some GPs ask all new patients to have a full health check. This will usually be carried out by a nurse. It is important that you and your family members go to this appointment, even if you/they are well.

The health check will give the doctor a good indication of your/their general health and will enable the GP to provide the most appropriate advice and future treatment.

How do I get to see my GP?

It is usual for you to make an appointment either by telephone or by visiting the surgery or health centre. If you want to make an appointment by telephone but you do not speak English, you can ask an English speaking friend or relative to telephone on your behalf and make an appointment at a time which is convenient to you. If your need to see your GP is urgent, ask your friend or relative to ensure that this information is clearly stated to the receptionist.

Patients with more urgent health care needs are seen as quickly as possible. If the doctor thinks that you are too ill to come to the surgery, then he or she may visit you at home. If your appointment is for a non-urgent problem, you may wait one or two days for an appointment.

What if I need non-emergency health care when my GP surgery or health centre is closed?

In these circumstances, you should telephone the NHS24 helpline on 08454 242424. If you are non-English speaking, you should ask an English speaking friend or relative to telephone on your behalf.

Do I and my family qualify for free NHS health care?

This is a short summary which gives the basic information to establish if you and your family are entitled to free NHS health care. If you are in doubt, please ask the GP receptionist for guidance, or ask an English speaking friend or relative to contact Lesley Boyd, whose details are shown on page 1.

European Economic Area (EEA) Countries and Countries with Reciprocal Agreements

All nationals of the European Economic Area (EEA) countries (and Switzerland) and those countries with reciprocal agreements, are eligible to receive free NHS health care, the "treatment the need for which arose during the visit". The list of EEA countries and those countries with reciprocal agreements are shown below.

For EEA nationals, the entitlement to free NHS health care is certified by the European Health Insurance Card.

The EEA countries are:

Austria	Liechtenstein
Belgium	Lithuania*
Bulgaria***	Luxembourg
Cyprus*	Malta*
Czech Republic*	Netherlands
Denmark	Norway
Estonia*	Poland*
Finland	Portugal
France	Romania***
Germany	Slovakia Republic*
Greece	Slovenia*
Hungary*	Spain
Iceland	Sweden
Ireland	Switzerland**
Italy	United Kingdom
Latvia*	

Key

* EEA Accession countries that joined in May 2004

** Not part of EEA but included in health care provisions

*** Joined EEA on 1st January 2007

Countries with Reciprocal Health Care Agreements

The undernoted non-EEA countries have reciprocal agreements with the EEA countries. Their nationals are entitled to receive free NHS health care for “treatment the need for which arose during the visit”.

Anguilla	Malta
Australia	Montserrat
Barbados	New Zealand
British Virgin Islands	Russian Federation
St Helena	Falkland Islands
Gibraltar	Former Yugoslavia
Isle of Man	Turks and Caicos Islands
Former Soviet Union States	

Asylum seekers/Refugees

An asylum seeker is someone who has submitted an application for protection under the Geneva Convention and who is waiting for that claim for asylum to be decided by the Home Office.

A refugee is someone who:

“has a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion is outside the country they belong to or normally reside in and is unable or unwilling to return home for fear of persecution.”

As an Asylum Seeker/Refugee, you are entitled to the same free NHS health care as the indigenous population. You should produce your HC2 certificate when you go to register with a GP. HC2 certificates are issued on behalf of the Department of Health. They are issued to the main applicant but details of dependants are included on the certificate in order to enable the whole family to access free NHS services.

In addition, as an asylum seeker/refugee you may also have been issued with an Applicant Registration Card (ARC card), for identification purposes. Again, if you have an ARC card, this should be taken with you when you go to register with a GP. The ARC card is proof that you have lodged an application for asylum in Britain.

Work Permit Holders

Many non-EEA nationals and nationals from countries that do not have EEA reciprocal agreements, enter the UK on a work permit each year. If you hold a work permit which is for less than 6 months duration, neither you nor your family here as dependents have any entitlement to free health care.

If you hold a work permit which is for more than 6 months duration, you and your family here as dependents are entitled to free NHS health care.

After 12 months of working in the UK, a work permit holder can apply for an EEA Residents Permit. If as a work permit holder you have spent five continuous years in the UK, you would usually become eligible for “Indefinite Leave to Remain”. Holders of an EEA Residents Permit and those with “Indefinite Leave To Remain” are entitled to free NHS health care.

Examples of Exceptions and Special Cases

There are many exceptions to the regulations governing free access to NHS health care. Here are a few examples. If you require more information, please ask the GP receptionist, practice manager or contact Lesley Boyd, whose contact details are shown on page 1 of this booklet.

Temporary Residents from Non-EEA Countries and Countries that do not have Reciprocal Health Care Agreements

A temporary resident is someone who has been in an area served by a Practice, for more than 24 hours, but less than 3 months. A GP has the discretion, if they wish, to register a non-EEA national or a national from a country that does not have EEA reciprocal agreements, as a temporary resident with their practice and thereby provide free primary health care services to them and their family, regardless of their status.

If a temporary resident has been in the UK for more than 3 months, A GP has the discretion, if they wish, to register a non-EEA national or a national from a country that does not have EEA reciprocal agreements, with their practice and thereby provides free primary care services to them and their family, regardless of their status.

It should be noted that other NHS services such as hospital care, might not necessarily be free to temporary residents from countries outwith the EEA and countries that do not have reciprocal health care agreements with the EEA.

Other Main Exceptions and Special Case Exemptions Are:

Emergency treatment in an A&E department or provided by a general practitioner

Family Planning Services

Treatment for certain infectious diseases, (including sexually transmitted diseases)

Involuntary psychiatric treatment

HIV/AIDS

Treatment provided as a result of a Court Order

Anyone who has been in the UK legally and lawfully for more than one year

If the primary purpose of being in the UK is for employment and they are currently employed.

A student who is pursuing a full time course of study, their dependents are also exempt from charges

Accredited diplomatic staff

Off shore employees working in UK territorial waters or in the UK sector of the North Sea

Crew members employed on UK registered vessels

Au Pairs

In terms of NHS regulations, au pairs are defined as:

“...persons who come to the UK to learn the English language and to live for up to 2 years as a member of an English speaking family. Au pairs are unmarried, aged between 17 and 27, without any dependents in terms of these arrangements...”

If an au pair comes from an EEA country or a country with a reciprocal health care agreement, they enjoy the same rights to free NHS health care as any other national of that country.

If an au pair comes from a non-EEA country or a country that does not have a reciprocal agreement, they have no entitlement to free NHS health care, until they have been resident in the UK for one year.

What if I Have no Proof of Entitlement to Free NHS Health Care?

If you cannot prove your entitlement to free NHS health care for non-emergency treatment, then you cannot receive free NHS non-emergency treatment.

What if I need emergency health care?

Everyone has an entitlement to free emergency health care, whether this is provided at an Accident and Emergency department or by a GP, regardless of their status.

If you or your family have a serious accident or a medical emergency, contact the ambulance service by dialling 999.

If you do not speak English, ask an English speaking friend or relative to telephone on your behalf.