

## **GUIDE TO FREE NHS PRESCRIPTIONS**

### **Who can get free prescriptions?**

You can get free NHS prescriptions if, at the time the prescription is dispensed, you:

- Are 60 or over – tick box A on the reverse of the prescription
- Are under 16 – tick box A on the reverse of the prescription
- Are 16 to 18 and in full-time education – tick box B on the reverse of the prescription
- Are pregnant or have had a baby in the previous 12 months and have a valid maternity exemption certificate (MatEx) – tick box D on the reverse of the prescription
- Have a specified medical condition and have a valid medical exemption certificate (MedEx) – tick box E on the reverse of the prescription
- Have a continuing physical disability that prevents you going out without help from another person and have a valid medical exemption certificate (MedEx) – tick box E on the reverse of the prescription
- Hold a valid war pension exemption certificate and the prescription is for your accepted disability - tick box G on the reverse of the prescription
- Are an NHS inpatient

You are also entitled to free prescriptions if you or your partner (by marriage or civil partnership) receive, or you are under the age of 20 and the dependant of someone receiving:

- Income Support - tick box H on the reverse of the prescription
- Income-based Employment and Support allowance - tick box H on the reverse of the prescription
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance - tick box K on the reverse of the prescription
- Pension Credit Guarantee Credit - tick box S on the reverse of the prescription
- Universal Credit and meet the earnings criteria for your last assessment period of (i) £435 or less, or (ii) £935 or less if you get an element for a child or have limited capability for work - tick box U on the reverse of the prescription

You are also entitled to free prescriptions if you are entitled to or named on:

- A valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate – if you do not have a certificate, you can show your award notice. You qualify if you get Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits with a disability element (or both), and have income for tax credit purposes of £15,276 or less. Tick box M on the reverse of the prescription

- A valid NHS certificate for full help with health costs (HC2) - tick box L on the reverse of the prescription

### **How do I check if I am eligible for free prescriptions?**

A simple way to check your eligibility for free NHS prescriptions and help with other NHS costs is to use the eligibility checker. This can be accessed at <https://services.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/check-for-help-paying-nhs-costs/start>.

### **What medical conditions qualify for free prescriptions?**

The following medical conditions qualify you for a Medical exemption certificate:

- Cancer, including the effects of cancer and the effects of current or previous cancer treatment
- A permanent fistula (for example, a laryngostomy, colostomy, ileostomy or some renal dialysis fistulas) requiring continuous surgical dressing or an appliance
- A form of hypoadrenalism (for example, Addison's disease) for which specific substitution therapy is essential
- Diabetes insipidus or other forms of hypopituitarism
- Diabetes mellitus, except where treatment is by diet alone
- Hypoparathyroidism
- Myasthenia gravis
- Myxoedma (hypothyroidism requiring thyroid hormone replacement)
- Epilepsy requiring continuous anticonvulsive therapy
- A continuing physical disability that means you cannot go out without the help of another person (temporary disabilities do not count, even if they last for several months)

There is more information about medical exemption certificates at <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/exemption-certificates/medical-exemption-certificates>.

### **How do I apply for a medical exemption certificate?**

To apply for a medical exemption certificate you need to obtain an FP92A form from your GP. Your GP will sign the form to confirm that your statement is correct (at the GP's discretion, a member of the practice with access to your medical records can also sign the form).

Your certificate will be valid from 1 month before the date that the NHS Business Services Authority receives the application form.

The medical exemption certificate lasts for 5 years and then needs to be renewed. It will be your responsibility to ensure that the certificate is renewed.

## **How do I apply for a maternity exemption certificate?**

If you are pregnant or have had a baby in the past 12 months, you can get free prescriptions if you have a valid maternity exemption certificate.

To apply for a maternity exemption certificate, contact your doctor, midwife or health visitor.

The certificate will last until 12 months after the expected date of birth of your baby.

If your baby is born early, you can continue to use your certificate until it expires.

If your baby is born late, you can apply for an extension.

If you apply after your baby is born, your certificate will last for 12 months from your baby's birth.

A maternity exemption certificate also gives you access to free NHS dental treatment.

## **How do I apply for a NHS certificate for help with health costs?**

If you have a low income, you may be eligible to receive financial help through the NHS Low Income Scheme, which uses an HC2 or HC3 certificate to show your eligibility. You can apply for this scheme as long as your savings, investments or property (not including where you live), or those of your partner (or both of you) do not exceed the capital limit. In England, the capital limit is:

- £23,250 for people who live permanently in a care home
- £16,000 for everyone else

To apply for an HC2 certificate, you need to complete form HC1, which is available from Jobcentre Plus offices or most NHS hospitals. You might also be able to get an HC1 form from your doctor, dentist or optician.

You can also get an HC1 form by calling 0300 330 1343.

You qualify for a full help HC2 certificate (which includes free NHS prescriptions) if your income is less than or equal to your requirements, or your income is greater than your requirements by no more than half the current English prescription charge.

You qualify for a limited help HC3 certificate if your income is greater than your requirements by more than half the current English prescription charge.

The HC3 certificate shows how much you have to pay towards your health costs.

Certificates are usually valid for between 6 months and 5 years, depending on your circumstances.

### **Can I reclaim a refund on a prescription charge?**

To claim a refund on a prescription charge, ask the pharmacist, hospital or doctors for the refund form (FP57) when you pay for the prescription. You cannot get a form afterwards.

You must apply for a refund within 3 months of paying the prescription charge.

If you receive Universal Credit and meet all the criteria to be entitled to help with health costs but did not get a refund form (FP57), contact the NHS Business Services Authority. Each application for a refund is considered on a case-by-case basis.

If you paid for a prescription prepayment certificate (PPC) and have become exempt from paying for prescriptions, you may be able to get some or all of the money back for your PPC. If you want to claim a refund, send the original certificate to NHS Business Services Authority, PPC Issue Office, 152 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 6SN clearly stating why you are claiming a refund and provide evidence of your entitlement to exemption (either a certificate number or a copy of all pages of a benefit letter).

### **Prescription Penalty Charges**

In England, patients pay for their NHS prescriptions. This is an important source of funding for the NHS.

Each year, the NHS loses significant funds due to people claiming free prescriptions they were not entitled to. This directly reduces the money available for core patient care.

This NHS carries out checks on patient claims. If they cannot confirm that a patient was entitled to claim free NHS prescriptions, the patient will be sent an enquiry letter asking them to confirm their entitlement. If they do not respond within 28 days, they will be sent a Penalty Charge Notice.

If you are sent a Penalty Charge Notice, you will be asked to pay the original NHS prescription, and an additional penalty charge. The penalty charge is five times the original amount owed, up to a maximum of £100.

Once a Penalty Charge Notice has been issued, if no payment has been made within 28 days, a surcharge may be added.

## **Important Telephone Numbers**

NHS Help with Health Costs helpline: 0300 330 1343

Prescription services helpline: 0300 330 1349

Queries about medical exemption certificates: 0300 330 1341

Queries about prescription prepayment certificates (PPC): 0300 330 1341

Queries about tax credit certificates: 0300 330 1347

Call 0300 123 0849 to order a paper copy of the HC12, HC5 and HC1 (SC) forms