

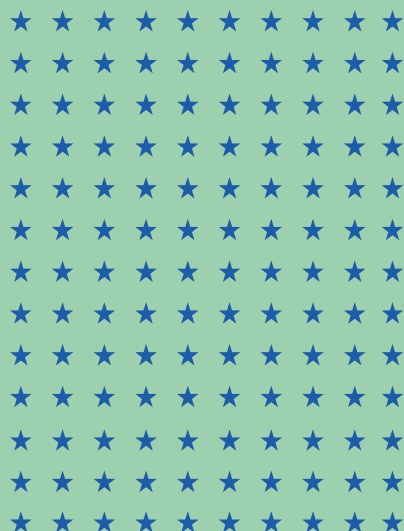
Patient exemption

A guide for pharmacy teams in England

Not everyone can claim free NHS prescriptions.

Checks are made on free NHS prescriptions to prevent and detect fraud and error. If a patient claims free NHS prescriptions they're not entitled to, they could have to pay a penalty charge of up to £100.

Patients can check if they're eligible at www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/check



Check before you tick



What entitles patients to free NHS prescriptions?

Age

Patients are entitled to free NHS prescriptions if they're:

- under 16
- 16, 17 or 18 and in full-time education
- 60 or over

Students aged 19 and over are not automatically entitled to free NHS prescriptions but can apply for help through the NHS Low Income Scheme - see HC2 (full help) certificate on page 4.

Certain benefits

Not all benefits entitle patients to free NHS prescriptions.



Patients are **entitled to free NHS prescriptions** if they're named on an award for:

- Income Support
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- certain Tax Credits – see NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate on page 3
- Universal Credit – only if earnings were £435 or less during the most recent assessment period (£935 if they had a child element or had limited capability for work)



Patients are **not automatically entitled** to free NHS prescriptions if they're named on an award for:

- contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit Savings Credit
- any benefit not listed, such as State Pension, Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment or Incapacity Benefit

Certificates

Some patients need an exemption certificate before they can claim free NHS prescriptions.

NHS maternity exemption certificate

Patients who are pregnant or have had a baby in the last 12 months need a valid **maternity exemption certificate** before they are entitled.

Patients should ask their midwife, doctor or health visitor to apply.

For more information, patients can go to **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/matex**

NHS medical exemption certificate

Patients with certain medical conditions need a valid **medical exemption certificate** before they are entitled.

Patients should ask their doctor to apply.

For more information patients can go to **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/medex**

NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate

Patients will automatically be sent this certificate if their annual family income used to work out their tax credits is **£15,276** or less and they get:

- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit including a disability element
- Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit paid together

Their partner and any young people included in their award will be entitled to free NHS prescriptions while the certificate is valid.

For more information patients can go to **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/taxcredits**

HC2 (full help) certificate

Patients who are not automatically eligible for free NHS prescriptions can apply for help through the NHS Low Income Scheme.

Patients with a valid **HC2 certificate** are entitled to free NHS prescriptions.

Their partner or any dependant children under 19 named on their claim will also be entitled to free NHS prescriptions while the certificate is valid.

The HC3 (partial help) certificate does not entitle patients to free NHS prescriptions.

For more information, patients can go to
www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/lowincomescheme

War Pensioners

Patients with a valid War Pension or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme exemption certificate or a prescription exemption certificate issued by the Ministry of Defence are entitled to free NHS prescriptions that relate to their accepted disability.

NHS Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC)

Patients who are not eligible for free NHS prescriptions could save money with a 3 or 12 month PPC. A PPC covers all their NHS prescriptions for a set price.

Patients with a valid 3 or 12 month PPC can claim free NHS prescriptions.

For more information or to buy a PPC, patients can go to
www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/ppc

Information for pharmacy teams selling 3 and 12 month PPCs is available at **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/pharmacysales**

NHS Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) PPC

Patients paying for certain HRT prescriptions could save money with an HRT PPC. An HRT PPC covers an unlimited number of listed HRT medicines for 12 months.

Patients with a valid HRT PPC can claim free HRT prescriptions that are covered by the certificate.

For more information or to buy an HRT PPC, patients can go to
www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/hrt-ppc

Information for pharmacy teams selling HRT PPCs is available at
www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/pharmacysales

What if the patient is unsure of their entitlement?

Patients can check if they're eligible for free NHS prescriptions at **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/check**

If they're still unsure or waiting to find out, ask them to pay and give an NHS receipt and refund FP57 form. Explain if they find out that they were entitled they can claim a refund within three months of paying the charge.

If more than three months have elapsed, the refund may not be paid unless the patient has a LIS04(P) form. Further information can be found in Part XVI of the Drug Tariff.

Claim for free NHS prescriptions process

Pharmacy teams have a responsibility to collect patient signatures and accurately record and report the patient's declaration of entitlement to free NHS prescriptions. Receiving a penalty charge incorrectly can cause inconvenience and distress for a patient.

Any time a patient makes a declaration that they are exempt from paying an NHS prescription charge, you must ask them, or their representative, to:

- mark the right box for why they didn't pay
- read and sign the patient declaration
- produce evidence of their eligibility



What you **should** do:

Encourage your patients to check that they're entitled before claiming free NHS prescriptions.

Ask patients to check the form before they sign the declaration, as they are responsible for making sure the information is correct to avoid a penalty charge.

Mark if evidence was not seen.

If evidence is required but not provided, advise that checks are made to verify claims for free NHS prescriptions.



What you **shouldn't** do:

Make assumptions. Remember not all benefits entitle patients to free NHS prescriptions and some patients need an exemption certificate before they are eligible.

Do not refuse to dispense a prescription if the patient does not provide evidence.

If the patient shows a valid exemption certificate, you can note this on your PMR system along with the expiry date of the certificate.

Signing the declaration

If a patient makes a declaration that they are exempt from paying NHS prescription charges, they must sign the FP10/token.

You should check every exempt prescription to ensure that:

- an exemption box has been clearly marked with a line in the 'If you didn't pay' section
- the patient has signed in the signature box of the declaration

Patients are not required to make a signed declaration if:

- they are age exempt and the patient's age is computer printed on the front of the script
- all items present on the prescription are 'free-of-charge' - see page 7
- the prescription has been confirmed as exempt by Real Time Exemption Checking - see page 9

Free-of-charge (FOC)

FOC contraceptive items

The NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) automatically identifies contraceptive items listed in Part XVI of the Drug Tariff as FOC. Box X, 'was prescribed free-of-charge contraceptives', has been removed from the paper FP10/FP10DT token.

For items not listed in Part XVI that may be used for contraceptive purposes, the prescriber must endorse the prescription with CC, OC, or the female symbol (♀) to indicate that no prescription charge should be incurred.

If the only item(s) on the prescription are FOC contraceptives, or for contraceptive purposes endorsed CC, OC or ♀ or endorsed with FS:

- the patient doesn't need to make a declaration
- you don't need to submit an EPS token to the NHSBSA

Before you submit your claim for payment you need to populate the relevant FOC exemption code in the EPS claim. Some systems handle these exemptions automatically, so you may not need to specify a patient exemption.

The NHSBSA automatically handle all FOC items regardless of the charge or exempt status in the EPS claim.

FOC treatments for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

When a patient is prescribed FOC sexual health treatment, the prescriber should endorse the item FS to indicate that it is a free supply, and no prescription charge should be incurred.

If the prescription is EPS, FS must be present in the prescriber endorsement field.

There is no patient tick box for FOC sexual health treatment on the reverse of the FP10/FP10DT token.

The code 0017 'was prescribed FOC sexual health medication' has been added to EPS systems.

If the only item(s) on the prescription are FOC contraceptives, or for contraceptive purposes endorsed CC, OC or ♀ or endorsed with FS:

- the patient doesn't need to make a declaration
- you don't need to submit an EPS token to the NHSBSA

Before you submit your claim for payment you need to populate the relevant FOC exemption code in the EPS claim. Some systems handle these exemptions automatically, so you may not need to specify a patient exemption.

The NHSBSA automatically handle all FOC items regardless of the charge or exempt status in the EPS claim.

Prisoners on Release - EPS code 0015

People who have just been released from prison do not have to pay for NHS prescriptions. This only applies to prescriptions issued by prison doctors until the patient registers with a GP.

To be classed as exempt, the prescription must have 'HMP' printed in the box for the practice address at the front of the prescription form. In these instances, the patient does not need to complete a signed declaration on the back of the form.

EPS exemption category 0015 is for the processing of HMP prisoners on release.

On some dispensing systems this category is worded in a misleading way, for example 'patient does not have to pay a prescription charge'. Exemption category 0015 should only be used for the processing of HMP prisoners on release.

Real Time Exemption

Checking

Real Time Exemption Checking (RTEC) is an NHS electronic system which lets you check if a patient is eligible for free NHS prescriptions.

The service applies to prescriptions sent by EPS. It enables your PMR system to automatically check whether a patient has a known exemption that can be automatically applied.

It will confirm if an exemption is found but it will not confirm why they're exempt.



Prescription **confirmed** by RTEC as exempt:

No further prescription exemption checks required.

Patient doesn't need to provide evidence or complete a declaration on an EPS token.

Don't submit an EPS token to the NHSBSA.



Prescription **not confirmed** by RTEC as exempt:

Follow the normal exemption checking process.

If the patient believes they are exempt, ask them to make a declaration on the EPS token.

Submit the EPS token to the NHSBSA.

More information about RTEC is available at: <https://cpe.org.uk/digital-and-technology/systems-apps/real-time-exemption-checking-rtec/>

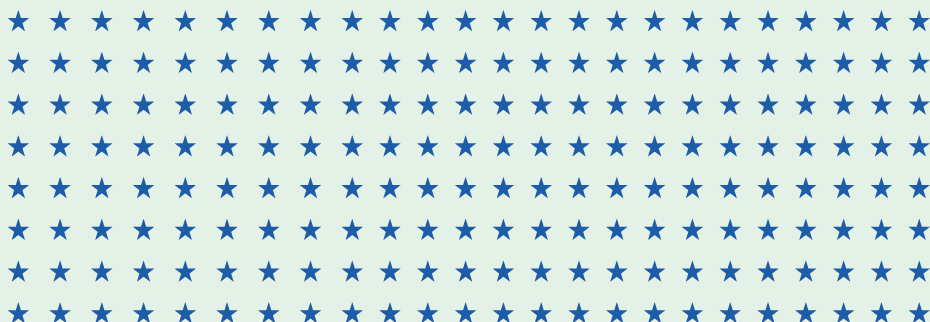
Submitting EPS tokens

When submitting an EPS claim, make sure the exemption category selected is correct and indicate whether evidence was seen.

All EPS tokens must be submitted to the NHSBSA, unless:

- the patient is age exempt (and the patient's age is computer printed on the front of the script)
- the prescription contains FOC items only
- the prescription is for 'Prisoners on Release'
- the prescription has been confirmed as exempt by the RTEC system

You do not need to sort your EPS tokens, but you must bundle them separately from your paper FP10 submissions when you send them to the NHSBSA.



NHS penalty charges

It is the patient's responsibility to make sure the correct box is marked on the back of their prescription claim form.

This is the case regardless of whether it is marked by:

- the patient
- someone on the patient's behalf
- pharmacy staff

The NHSBSA are responsible for checking claims for free NHS prescriptions and recovering charges from patients who incorrectly claim they do not have to pay.

NHS Penalty Charge Notices are issued in accordance with the [National Health Service \(Penalty Charge\) Regulations 1999](#).

If a patient is sent an enquiry letter or penalty charge, they'll be asked to pay the original NHS prescription cost, and an additional penalty charge. The penalty charge is five times the original amount owed, up to a maximum of £100.

For more information, visit: **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-penalty-charges**

You can support patients to claim correctly by displaying resources in your pharmacy. You'll find a range of digital and printable resources, such as posters and leaflets at **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/freeprescriptions**. All are free to download and use.