

NHS Number



Frequently Asked Questions For patients

This document aims to answer frequently asked questions from NHS patients regarding the NHS Number. If you have any feedback or require further information please contact the NHS Number team at nhsnumber@nhs.net or visit <http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/systemsandservices/nhsnumber/>

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1 The NHS Number

1.1 What is the NHS Number?

An NHS Number is a unique 10-digit number, assigned to every individual registered with the NHS in England and Wales and is used to support your healthcare. The new style of number was introduced in 1996, replacing a variety of inconsistent predecessors.

The NHS Number is displayed in a 3-3-4 format and would look something like this: 123 456 7890 (This NHS Number is only an example and should not be used as your own NHS Number).

Everyone who is registered with the NHS in England and Wales will have their own unique NHS Number.

1.2 What is my NHS Number?

You will be given your NHS Number in writing, when you register with a GP. This may come from the GP themselves or the primary care trust (PCT). Everyone registered with the NHS in England and Wales has their own unique NHS Number. Your NHS Number helps healthcare staff to find your health records. Each NHS Number is made up of 10 digits, shown like this: 450 557 7104 (please note: this is an example number only).

If you have an old medical card, it will have an old style NHS number made up of both letters and numbers. This has now been replaced for all patients by a new NHS number made up entirely of numbers. Not knowing your NHS Number or having the old-style NHS Number will not affect your care, but it is helpful to have your new ten digit NHS Number to give to NHS staff who are providing your care.

1.3 Why is the NHS Number important to me?

Your NHS Number is unique to you. Using your NHS Number to identify you correctly is an important step towards improving the safety of your healthcare.

If you know your NHS Number, or can show your medical card, you can help healthcare staff find your records more easily and share them safely with others who are caring for you.

As an added measure, you can start checking things the NHS sends you to make sure they have the right NHS Number.

1.4 Who has an NHS Number?

Anyone born in England, Wales or the Isle of Man since October 2002 will have an NHS Number. Anyone who has registered with a GP in England and Wales since 1996 will have an NHS Number. Therefore the proportion of people without an NHS Number is small, and is generally limited to people who have had no previous

contact with the NHS. Inability to trace a patient to determine their NHS Number is far more likely to be because the patient has not been correctly identified rather than because the patient does not have an NHS Number.

1.5 How do I find my NHS Number?

If you want to know your NHS Number, or you have an old style number and want to know your new one, please follow the instructions below:

To find out your NHS Number, you can ask your local PCT to look it up.

To find out the telephone number for your nearest PCT visit the NHS Choices website at the URL below and enter your postcode:

<http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust>

Alternatively, to find out your local PCT, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

When you telephone your local PCT, ask for the Patient and Practitioners' Service Agency. Registration staff will take your name, date of birth, address and then issue you with a medical card, usually within two days.

1.6 I have changed my name; does this affect my NHS number?

No, this does not affect your NHS Number, but you will need to update your name on your medical records.

Your GP practice is the best place to go to get your details updated. When you register with a new GP they will give you a GSM1 form to complete, which has a space for your NHS Number if you know it. You can put your new surname and previous surname on this form. The practice will change your details and this will update the national database.

1.7 Do I need to know my NHS Number if I need to use a general practice that I'm not registered with?

Not having your NHS Number is not a valid reason for a general practice not to register you. However, having it makes the process more efficient. If a patient uses general practice services and does not have their NHS number it will be traced by other means.

1.8 How are NHS Numbers allocated?

NHS Numbers are stored on a central system and are randomly allocated. Numbers that are allocated are never re-used.

NHS Numbers, unlike number plates for cars, have no information stored within them and are simply a unique 10 digit patient identifier.

1.9 Do I need my NHS Number to get care?

No, it is not essential to know your NHS Number, but it can be helpful if you are able to give it to NHS staff that need to find your health records.

1.10 Is my NHS Number the same as my National Insurance number?

No, your NHS Number is different from your National Insurance (NI) number, which is used for tax and pensions. If you have any questions about your NI number contact the local office of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). To find your local office, visit www.dwp.gov.uk. The National Insurance number is not used for health purposes because not everybody has one, such as children under 16 and people who are not eligible.

If you are registered with a GP practice you will already have an NHS Number. To find out your NHS Number you can contact your GP practice and ask them to look it up. To protect your privacy, they may ask you to show them proof of identification, for example a passport or driving license.

2 Medical cards

2.1 What is a medical card?

An NHS medical card can be issued when you first register with a GP practice. This would usually be sent from the PCT. It contains your NHS Number and other information such as your name, address, date of birth and details of your registered practice or individual doctor. Some PCTs no longer issue medical cards, but they will supply you with your NHS Number in writing.

2.2 How do I find out if I can obtain a medical card?

If you would like to find out if your PCT would provide you with a medical card, please contact them directly. To find your local PCT visit the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk, go to 'Primary Care Trusts' in the 'Find Services' section and enter your postcode. Or, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

2.3 Are there any plans to issue everyone with an NHS Number card, i.e. a card containing their NHS Number?

The National Patient Safety Agency mentioned in the Safer Practice Notice 'Risk to patient safety of not using the NHS Number as the national identifier for all patients' (Ref: NPSA/2008/SPN001) that the initiative to make the NHS Number mandatory will include considering whether every person can be issued with a card containing their NHS Number. Until a decision is made individual trusts and PCTs are provided with material for them to use in their own communication programmes.

3 Foreign nationals residing in the UK

3.1 I'm now a UK resident, but am originally from abroad. How do I apply for an NHS Number?

An NHS Number is a unique 10-digit number, assigned to every individual registered with the NHS in England and Wales and is used to support your healthcare.

If you are a resident in England now, you will be able to register with a local GP practice who will provide you with an NHS Number. To register with a GP, you need to find your local GP practice and request to register with them. You can find details of available GP practices in your local area by:

- finding the telephone number of your nearest GP Practice from the phone book
- going online to use the NHS Choices website at:
<http://www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx>.

There are a number of reasons why you may not be able to register with your chosen GP. For example, the practice may be full, or you may live too far away. If this is the case, simply choose another GP in your local area.

If you have difficulty registering with a GP, your local PCT will be able to help.

Please note that being registered with a GP, and having a NHS Number, does not give a person automatic entitlement to access free NHS treatment. For further details on eligibility please see:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Entitlementsandcharges/OverseasVisitors/index.htm>

4 Eligibility for free NHS treatment

4.1 Eligibility for free hospital treatment

Being registered with a GP, and having an NHS Number, does not give a person automatic entitlement to access free NHS hospital treatment. For further details on eligibility see Department of Health guidance:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Entitlementsandcharges/OverseasVisitors/Browsable/DH_074374

4.2 If I am visiting from outside the UK am I eligible for NHS treatment?

If you are coming to the UK on holiday or to visit friends or relatives, you must pay for any NHS hospital treatment needed during your stay. If you think you will have to pay for treatment, you are strongly advised to take out health insurance before your trip.

To find more information on overseas visitors please see the Department of Health guidance:

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Entitlementsandcharges/OverseasVisitors/index.htm>

If you are a visitor to this country and require NHS care, you will be allocated an NHS Number where it is possible to do so. In cases where the organisation is unable to allocate an NHS Number directly, you will be given a local hospital number.

Having an NHS Number does not entitle you to free NHS treatment.

If you are claiming for NHS treatment you may be asked to give proof that you are on a short term visit, such as your passport, identity card or travel documents. You will still have to pay the statutory NHS charges, unless you qualify for exemption from these. You will also have to join waiting lists for treatment where appropriate.

While visiting the UK you may ask any GP practice within the local area to be accepted as an NHS patient. They are free to decide who to accept onto their list of NHS patients and are more likely to accept you if you intend to live in the UK permanently. If the practice does not wish to accept you as an NHS patient, they may offer to treat you as a private patient for which you will have to pay charges.

However, if you require emergency treatment (at an Accident and Emergency department or walk-in centre) this will be given free of charge, regardless of the length of your stay or your nationality.

If you subsequently need to be admitted to hospital as an in-patient or seen at an outpatient clinic, you will then be subject to NHS charges.

4.3 Does my country have a healthcare agreement with the UK for free treatment?

If you come from a country with which the UK holds a healthcare agreement, you will not have to pay for treatment for a condition that started after your arrival in the UK or for treatment that is needed immediately. To see the healthcare agreement see the Department of Health guidance:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Entitlementsandcharges/OverseasVisitors/Browsable/DH_074391

The relevant authorities in your own country will have details of the arrangements covered by this agreement. In addition, the following guidance is available from the Department of Health:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Entitlementsandcharges/OverseasVisitors/Browsable/DH_074373

4.4 How do I know if I have to pay for my healthcare?

The hospital providing treatment is responsible for establishing who is entitled to free NHS hospital treatment. It will make its decision in accordance with the correct regulations. The hospital may ask you to provide evidence to support any claim to free treatment and it is your responsibility to do so if asked. If the hospital decides you are eligible for free NHS treatment, you will still have to pay statutory NHS charges unless you are otherwise exempt. If the hospital decides you are not entitled to free NHS treatment, charges will apply and cannot be waived.

4.5 What if I do not meet one of these exemption charges?

If you are not ordinarily a resident or are exempt under the correct regulations, charges will apply for any hospital treatment you receive and cannot be waived. If this is the case you are strongly advised to take out private healthcare insurance that will cover you for the length of time you are in the UK. There is no facility to purchase healthcare insurance from the NHS, therefore any necessary insurance must be organised privately.

A full list of NHS exemption charges is available from:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/healthcare/medicinespharmacyandindustry/prescriptions/nhscosts/dh_087013

4.6 What do I have to pay for?

All treatment given by staff at a hospital or by staff employed by a hospital may be subject to a charge with the following exceptions, which are free to all:

- treatment given in an Accident and Emergency (A&E) department (excludes emergency treatment given elsewhere in the hospital);
- treatment given in a walk-in centre providing similar services to those of an A&E department of a hospital;
- treatment for certain communicable diseases (excluding HIV/AIDS where it is only the first diagnosis and connected counselling sessions that are charge-free);
- compulsory psychiatric treatment;
- family planning services.

Please note the above information provides general guidance only and should not be treated as a complete and authoritative statement of law. In all cases the regulations place the responsibility of deciding who is entitled to receive free hospital treatment with the hospital providing treatment. For information on these regulations see the Department of Health's guidance at:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Entitlementsandcharges/OverseasVisitors/Browsable/DH_074374

5 Newborns and the NHS Number

Babies born in hospital in England and Wales are given an NHS Number soon after birth. Usually, your baby will be given an NHS Number whilst they are still at hospital. If your baby was born at home, they will receive an NHS Number when the midwife registers the birth.

5.1 How do babies get their NHS Number?

The NHS Numbers for Babies (NN4B) Service is a system that issues NHS Numbers for babies and enables babies to have an NHS Number from birth, for life. It is important that this unique identifier is issued at birth as vital tests and medical treatment are administered in the first six weeks of life. Usual patient identifiers (names and addresses) are often subject to change around the time of birth. Consequently, allocating an NHS Number to the birth details as part of the statutory duty of notifying the birth allows for the unique patient identifier to be used as soon as possible.

The NHS Number can then be used on all documentation relating to the baby, including birth notifications, discharge letters and labels, thereby supporting safe patient identification practices across organisational boundaries.
Useful links for NHS Number for babies:

- NN4B website – (an N3 connection is required to access this website)
<http://nww.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/demographics/births/nn4b>

5.2 What is the FP58 form?

The FP58 form used to be issued by the registrar of births to the parents of new born babies when the birth was registered with the registrar of births, deaths and marriages. It contained the NHS Number and was used to register a child with a GP surgery. Since 1st April 2009 the FP58 form has not been issued. Maternity units now inform the mother of their baby's NHS Number directly, usually by printing out a label with the baby's details and NHS Number and attached this to an 'NHS Number - From Birth for Life' leaflet, or onto a letter/form or inside the baby's 'Red Book'. The GMS1 GP registration form should then be used for the registration of the baby with the GP practice.

All PCTs are now connected to a national IT system, known as the Spine. This contains the information of all patients registered in the NHS, including new births, using the NHS Number as the national patient identifier. This means that due changes in the administration of primary care the FP58 form is no longer required.

6 GP information

6.1 How do I find a GP?

If you are a resident in the UK, you should register with a GP practice. To find details of GP practices in your local area you can:

- telephone your nearest GP practice.
- go online to the NHS Choices website:
www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx, select 'GP' and enter your postcode to find a GP.

6.2 How do I register with a GP?

If you are resident in England or Wales you are able to register with a local GP practice. To register with a GP, you need to find your local GP surgery and request to register with them. You can find details of what GP surgeries are available in your local area by:

- telephone your nearest GP
- going online to the NHS Choices website:
www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx. Select GP and enter your postcode to find a GP

There are a number of reasons why you may not be able to register with your chosen GP. For example, the practice may be full, or you may live too far away.

If this is the case, simply choose another GP in your local area. If you have difficulty registering with a GP, your local PCT will be able to help.

6.3 What is a GP practice?

Usually, a small group of GPs work together in a practice, often referred to as a surgery, clinic or health centre. Only a small number of GPs now work by themselves in a single-handed practice. GPs are among a group of healthcare professionals who offer a first line of contact between patients and the NHS. GPs provide consultations in practices and through home visits. Although most GPs are not directly employed NHS staff, they do practice within NHS guidelines. These guidelines include the use of the NHS Number.

GPs are mostly independent contractors to the NHS and provide their own premises and employ their own staff. GP practices, along with other local health services, such as opticians and pharmacies, are grouped together into PCTs.

6.4 My GP practice says I need to know my NHS Number before I can register

This information is incorrect and it is likely that your GP has been misinformed, so has passed the wrong information on to you. Your GP is able to register you without

your NHS Number, although it is helpful if you already know this. You should be asked to complete a GMS1 form by the surgery. Your medical records, including your NHS Number will then be sent on to your new GP surgery. You can obtain your NHS Number directly from your PCT. Please contact them and ask that they provide you with your NHS Number.

To find your local PCT go to the NHS Choices website

<http://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectorios/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx>, select 'NHS Trusts' then enter your postcode to search for your local PCT.

6.5 What is the GMS1 form?

This GMS1 form is for patients, who have not been previously registered permanently with an NHS GP. GMS1 form is a short questionnaire, entitled 'Family Doctor Services Registration' which asks you for information including your name, date of birth, gender, address, telephone number, date of entry to UK (if non-UK citizen), details of previous doctor, and whether you need your surgery to dispense medicines (if you live far away from a pharmacist).

When a patient wishes to register with a new GP practice they will be asked to complete the GMS1 form.

The registration process followed using the GMS1 form includes tracing the patient's NHS Number via the primary care registration back office on a national system known as Personal Demographics Service (PDS), to ensure that the correct NHS Number is obtained. The PDS record will provide information about the patient's previous GP and allow their previous medical history to be transferred to the new practice. The transfer process can then be completed through the electronic GP2GP service.

6.6 What do I do if I have never registered with a GP practice, will I have an NHS Number?

When you register with a local GP surgery, you will be given an NHS Number as part of registration. You can either go to a GP surgery yourself to register or ask your local PCT to put you on the list of a local GP practice.

- to find out the telephone number for your nearest PCT visit the NHS Choices website (<http://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectorios/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx>) - select 'NHS trusts' and enter your postcode.
- alternatively call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.

7 The NHS structure

7.1 What is a primary care trust (PCT)?

Health care in the UK is divided into 'primary' and 'secondary' services. Primary care services are provided by the people you normally see first when you have a health problem, such as a GP, dentist, optician and pharmacist. NHS Walk-in centres and the NHS Direct phone service are also part of primary care.

All of these primary care services are managed by PCTs. There are about 300 PCTs in England, each one covering a separate local area.

- PCTs are a very important part of the NHS, they receive about 80% of the total NHS budget. PCTs decide what health services a local community needs, and they are responsible for providing them. They must ensure that there are enough services for people within their local area and that the services are accessible. These services include:
 - GP Practices
 - dentists
 - pharmacists
 - opticians
 - NHS Direct
 - NHS walk-in centres.

PCTs control funding for hospitals, they make decisions about hospital the type of services that hospitals provide and are responsible for making sure that the quality of service is high enough.

As PCTs are local organisations that understand the needs of their local community. They make sure that NHS organisations work effectively with local authorities, and other agencies that provide local health and social care services, so that the local community's treatment needs are met.

7.2 What is an acute trust?

An NHS hospital trust, also known as an acute trust is an NHS trust that provides secondary health services within the NHS in England and Wales. Hospital trusts are commissioned to provide these services by NHS PCTs.

Trusts judged to be performing with outstanding efficiency may apply to Monitor, an independent regulator of NHS foundation trusts. These trusts are given greater independence from NHS SHAs.

As of December 2009 there are 168 acute NHS trusts in England.

7.3 What is a strategic health authority (SHA)?

SHAs were created by the government in 2002 to manage the local NHS on behalf of the secretary of state, there were originally 28 SHAs. On 1 July 2006, this number was reduced to 10 in an aim to provide more tactical organisations who could deliver stronger commissioning functions, leading to improved services for patients and better value for money for the taxpayer. A map of the old and new SHAs is available at

http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4133760.pdf

SHAs are responsible for:

- developing plans for improving health services in their local area,
- making sure local health services are of a high quality and are performing well,
- increasing the capacity of local health services - so they can provide more services, and
- making sure national priorities are integrated into local health service plans, such as programmes for improving cancer services.

SHAs manage the NHS locally and are a key link between the Department of Health and the NHS

7.4 How to I find my local PCT?

You can find your local PCT by visiting the NHS Choices website.

<http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx>, select the 'Find your Primary Care Trust' option on the right hand side and enter your postcode.

