

THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

This leaflet explains how the National Health Service (NHS) works in the UK.

The National Health Service provides health care in the UK and is funded by taxation. Asylum seekers are entitled to access NHS care without charge while their claim or appeal is being considered. You need an HC2 form, provided by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), or available at pharmacies, to receive free medicines, dental treatment, eye tests and some glasses. None of the people who work for the NHS, including doctors, nurses and interpreters, will pass on any information about you to any other person or organisation without your permission. All medical care is confidential and does not affect the judgement on your claim for asylum.

How do I get help with my health?

If you are ill or worried about your health or the health of anyone in your family, you should go to see your local doctor, called a General Practitioner (GP). The GP's clinic is called a Surgery or a Health Centre. You should register with a GP as soon as possible so that you can get medical care if you need it. To register you will need to give your name, date of birth, address and telephone number if you have one. Your support worker, who helped you to move into your accommodation, will know the local arrangements for registering. Some GPs ask all new patients to have a health check. This will usually be carried out by a nurse. It is important that you go to this appointment even if you are well. If a practice will not register you, you can ask the local Primary Care Trust to assign you to a practice.

How do I make an appointment?

Before you visit your doctor or one of the nurses at the surgery you will usually need to make an appointment in person or by telephone. You can ask to see a male or female doctor or nurse, although this may not always be possible. You may have to wait a few days for a non-urgent appointment. If you think you need to see the doctor urgently tell the receptionist when you make the appointment, and you will be seen that day if appropriate. If the doctor thinks you are too ill to come to the surgery, he/she may visit you at home. Appointments with the doctor will be for five or ten minutes. You need to make a separate appointment for each member of the family that wishes to see the doctor. Please make sure that you arrive on time for your appointment and if you are unable to attend your appointment please make sure you cancel it.

What if I do not speak English?

If you need an interpreter you must tell the receptionist when you make the appointment. Tell the staff which language you speak and they will book an interpreter for you or get an interpreter on the phone. It is important that you and the doctor understand each other so that he/she can make an accurate diagnosis of your problem.

Who else works with my GP?

- Nurses are very highly trained in the UK. They take care of many health needs including vaccinations, contraception advice, and chronic illnesses such as diabetes and can give general health advice.
- Midwives look after pregnant women and their new-born babies. Care before the birth of the baby is called 'ante-natal' and after the birth 'postnatal'.
- Health Visitors are nurses who specialise in the care of children and their families and in helping people to stay healthy. They may come to visit you at your home.

What if I need to see a specialist doctor?

Your GP will usually provide most of your health care and will decide if you need to see a specialist doctor (a consultant), or if you need to go to hospital. Everyone in the UK has to wait to see these specialist doctors. The hospital will write to you with details of your appointment. You must contact the hospital if you need an interpreter to be present at your appointment. Hospital appointments may sometimes be in hospitals some distance from where you live, although you can get help with costs of travel if you have an HC2.

Patient Held Records

If you have been given a Patient Held Record (blue book), please take this with you every time you have an appointment with the doctor or nurse. The information in this book is for yourself and NHS staff. No-one else has a right to read this book.

Who else can help me?

Medicines

If your doctor wants you to take medicines he/she will write you a prescription. Take the prescription to a pharmacy or chemist shop. To get free prescriptions, you need your HC2 form. The pharmacist can give advice on the treatment of minor health problems. Some medicines can be bought from the pharmacist without a prescription, including some pain killers and cough medicines.

Dental Care

If you have a problem with your teeth you should see a dentist. To receive NHS dental treatment you need to register with a dentist. If you have trouble registering with a dentist you can contact NHS Direct, or the local Primary Care Trust.

Eyesight

If you need your eyes testing or need new glasses (spectacles) make an appointment to see an optician. They have shops in most town centres. The HC2 form covers the cost of the eye test and some glasses: ask the optician about this.

When your GP surgery is closed

GP surgeries are generally open from about 0830 to 1830 Monday to Friday. At all other times – at night, on Saturday or Sunday and on public holidays – medical assistance is available for health problems that cannot wait until the GP surgery is open. To get help you can ring the GP number and you will be redirected to the local out-of-hours and you can receive advice over the telephone. You may be asked to visit a medical centre or you may receive a visit from a medical professional at your home. If you do not speak English, the out-of-hours service can provide an interpreter. All you need to do is say in English the language you would prefer to use at the beginning of your call. If you do not speak any English ask a friend or relative or support worker to make the call for you and wait until an interpreter is on the line before you describe your problem. You will be asked for some details such as your name and address: this information is important and is not shared with anyone else.

What to do in an Emergency

In an emergency, if you or someone with you becomes seriously ill and cannot wait until the GP surgery is open, you can telephone 999 (free of charge) for an ambulance, or go to the Accident and Emergency Department of your local hospital. However, this service is only for emergencies. Do not use the Accident and Emergency Department for minor medical problems.