

# MEDICAL SERVICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



## Terminology

[National Health Service](#) (NHS) – The NHS is the UK's state run health service which provides treatment for UK nationals and citizens from other countries who qualify for free health care. Some services provided by the NHS are free and some need to be paid for.

The NHS healthcare service includes; General Practitioners (GPs/Doctors), Dentists, Opticians and Pharmaceutical services as well as hospital services.

The NHS provides a wide range of services, each one is highly specialised and focused to care for different illnesses and injuries. Choosing the right service can help to save time and lives.

[General Practitioner](#) (GPs) - are the first point of contact for most patients. GPs are your local personal doctors who are fully trained, experienced professionals and are trained to diagnose a wide range of health problems. The GP will be based in a local office (called a surgery) or in a Health Centre. It is important that you [choose a GP](#) you are happy with. In some countries it is normal to go to the hospital first. In the UK it is normal to go to the GP first unless it is an emergency.

[Pharmacy](#) – also referred to as a chemist, offer advice on common problems such as coughs and colds, aches and pains and wellbeing advice. Pharmacists dispense prescriptions and other medicines.

[NHS Direct](#) – web based and telephone service offered by the NHS. This service provides expert health advice including an on-line tool [to check your symptoms](#). The site or telephone service will provide you with helpful advice and refer you to the appropriate support; this could be a GP, Hospital or Pharmacy.

[Walk in Centre](#) – NHS walk in centres offer convenient access to a range of treatments including: infections and rashes, blood pressure checks, fractures, stomach aches, vomiting and diarrhoea, minor cuts and bruises.

[Minor Injuries Unit](#) - can treat: sprains and strains, broken bones, wound infections, minor burns and scalds, minor head injuries, insect and animal bites, minor eye injuries, injuries to the back, shoulder and chest.

[Accident and Emergency departments](#) are extremely busy departments and should only be used if your injury or illness is life threatening.

[Out of Hours](#) outside of normal office hours there are a number of ways you can still receive treatment

## Introduction

The National Health Service may appear quite complicated if you have never used the service before. This guide has been developed to help you get the most from the service and answer any queries that you may have. If you are still unsure after you have read this document please [contact Student Wellbeing Service](#) and we will be more than happy to assist you.

## How does the NHS Service work for international students?

### Students on courses of 6 months or more.

All international students who are studying on a course of 6 months or more are eligible for full health care (excluding dental treatment) under the NHS. This includes registering with a G.P, hospital treatment and the treatment of pre-existing medical conditions. In addition if your spouse or/and children are resident in the UK with you as dependents they are also entitled to the same health care service.

### Students on courses of less than 6 months.

If your course is less than 6 months, but is at least 35% UK government funded you will qualify for free treatment subject to providing evidence of the funding.

If you do not meet the above criteria it is important that you take out medical insurance for you and your dependents from a reputable company. Medical insurance should be arranged for the duration of your stay as you will only be entitled to limited free NHS treatment e.g. free emergency hospital treatment but only if this treatment is administered in an Accident and Emergency department, once you are administered to a ward or given an outpatient appointment charges will apply. The Accident and Emergency Department should not be used for minor medical issues.

## What does the NHS provide free of charge?

If you are entitled to NHS treatment, the following will be free of charge:

- Free consultation with your GP
- Free hospital treatment in Accident and Emergency
- Free hospital treatment if your GP recommends it
- Free contraceptive services
- Free maternity care

You will need to pay for

- Medicines prescribed by your GP (referred to as [prescription costs](#))
- Some GP services (e.g. vaccinations for travel)

## **Can I register with a GP if I am an international student?**

Yes. It is important that you register with a GP and we would encourage you to do this within the first 2 weeks of arriving in the UK, even if you do not feel ill or do not normally get ill.

## **Why should I register with a GP?**

The provision of non-emergency health care depends on you registering with a GP and it is normal for a GP to refuse you an appointment if you have not registered. Registering with a GP will allow you access to local treatment and health services.

- Free consultation with your GP
- Free hospital treatment in Accident and Emergency
- Free hospital treatment if your GP recommends it
- Free contraceptive services
- Free maternity care

## **How much does it cost to register with a GP?**

It is free to register with a GP.

## **Why register with a GP if I can go to a walk in centre?**

A walk in centre can only treat you for minor illnesses and injuries; in addition they work on a first come first served basis which may result in a lengthy wait for you. Registering with a GP is also beneficial for long-term conditions as seeing the same GP builds up a bond of trust between you and the GP as well as a good knowledge of your healthcare needs.

## **How do I register with a GP?**

As part of registration at Newcastle University you will be able to register with a GP. If you miss registration or chose not to register with a GP at that point then follow these instructions:

First locate your nearest GP Practise at:

<http://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx?ServiceType=GP>

Call the GP service and ask when would be the best time to call and register. If you require an [interpreter](#) please advise the surgery so this can be arranged. This service is free.

You will need:

- Your passport
- Evidence that you are a student (enrolment letter or student card)
- Proof of your UK address (accommodation contract or tenancy agreement)

You will be asked to:

- Complete the form at the practise and you will be added to the NHS register

Finally:

- If you are accepted a medical card with your NHS number will be sent to you by post

## **Which GP can I register with?**

[Find your nearest doctors surgery](#); enter your UK address postcode or the University postcode NE1 7RU for a list of your local GPs.

## **Can I request a female/male doctor?**

Yes, 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 explain this when you register.

## **What is the difference between a medical group and a surgery?**

There is no difference between these two terms and you are able to register with a GP at either a surgery or a medical group.

## **How does the appointment system work?**

You should telephone your GP when you are ill to make an appointment. Timescales for appointments can vary from a few to days to a few weeks at very busy practises. However, if you are worried you can use [NHS Direct symptom checker](#) for advice.

## **How much does it cost to visit a doctor?**

If you are registered with a GP there is no charge, however you may be charged for the cost of any prescribed medication.

## **Can I receive help with NHS costs?**

There are some charges for certain NHS items these include:

- NHS prescription charges
- NHS dental treatment
- Sight Tests
- Glasses or Contact Lenses

However as a student you may qualify for help with these costs as your income is low. In order to see if you qualify you must complete the [HC1 form](#). If your application is successful you may qualify for full help with costs or partial help.

## **Can I have an interpreter?**

Yes, an [interpreter/translator service](#) is available. If you require this service for a hospital or doctor's appointment you should inform the medical centre well in advance of your appointment. In addition NHS direct offer a [telephone interpreter service](#) and the NHS choices website can be [translated in to other languages](#).

## **How do I book an interpreter?**

Please speak to your GP who will organise an [interpreter](#) for you.

## **Why don't you always receive medicine when you visit the GP?**

The healthcare service you receive in the UK may vary from the medical support you are used to. For example it is important to understand that a UK doctor will not always prescribe medication. It is expected that a GP will only prescribe antibiotics for serious infections and not general illnesses such as colds and flu; this is because there is evidence that if you use antibiotics too much they stop being as effective. In addition doctors do not routinely carry out blood tests and if a blood test is required this will often be carried out by a nurse. If you require medication for cold and flu symptoms you should in the first instance speak to a pharmacist.

## **How long do I have to wait for an appointment?**

Timescales for appointments can vary from a few days to a few weeks at very busy practises. If you require an urgent appointment please inform the surgery when you make your appointment.

## **Why is it unsafe to self-diagnose and use medicine brought into the country?**

Self diagnosis can be dangerous, GP's study for many years in order to tell what different symptoms mean and prescribe the most appropriate treatments. Reliable symptom checkers are available and we would encourage you only to use a [symptom checker](#) such as that provided by NHS direct.

## **Why can't I just use Accident and Emergency?**

Accident and Emergency services should only be used by those with serious injuries or illness which are believed to be life threatening. Using Accident and Emergency when it is not an urgent problem can result in lengthy delays for patients in real need of urgent care. You should however use Accident and Emergency in the following circumstances or if you feel your injury or illness is life threatening:

- Loss of consciousness
- Acute confused state and fits that are not stopping
- Persistent, severe chest pain
- Breathing difficulties
- Severe bleeding that can't be stopped

If your symptoms are not life threatening you should use one of the other NHS Services these include, the GP you have registered with, [NHS Direct](#), [NHS walk in Centres](#) and [Minor Injuries Services](#).

## **Dental Treatment for International Students**

### **How to register with a dentist**

To register with a dentist you must first register with a GP. If you fail to register with a GP you will be required to pay the cost of private treatment which is quite a lot more expensive than NHS treatment.

### **What costs are involved?**

There is a charge for dental treatment however NHS treatment is less expensive than that provided by private practises (can you define provate practices for them?). Charges can vary and you are advised to discuss costs in advance with the dentist. You may not have to pay if

- You are under 18 years of age
- You are under 19 and in full time education
- You are pregnant and hold a valid exemption certificate
- You have had a baby within the last 12 months and hold a valid exemption certificate
- You are eligible to seek help under the NHS Low Income Scheme (ask your dentist for form HC1)
- You are getting Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or Pension Credit Guarantee Credit

### **Where is my local dentist?**

[Find your nearest dental surgery](#); click on dentists, enter your UK address postcode or the University postcode NE1 7RU for a list of your local GPs. Before selecting your dentist check that they accept NHS patients. When you are accepted you will need to give the dentist your NHS number.