NHS England

Date published: 19 October, 2026
Date last updated: 19 October, 2026

You and your general practice

Publication (/publication)

Content

- Contacting your practice
- Using a practice's online form
- When your practice is closed
- What if it's an emergency?
- What happens when you contact your practice to get an appointment
- Who you might see or speak to
- Seeing a GP if you're under 16
- What if you need extra help?
- How do you choose a general practice?
- How to register with a general practice
- Do you need ID or proof of address?
- Can a practice say no to registering you?
- If you are new to the UK
- If you are away from home but still in the UK
- Do general practices charge for anything?
- How should everyone be treated?
- Can you choose which hospital or clinic you are referred to?
- How you can help your general practice
- How can you view your online GP health record?

- How can you give feedback or raise concerns?

This is the English language version of the You and your general practice guidance. Translations for 20 other languages are available from the You and your general practice section of the NHS England website (https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/you-and-your-general-practice/).

This guide tells you what you can expect from your general practice and how to use its services.

Contacting your practice

Your general practice will be open from **8.00am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday**.

During these hours you or your carer can:

- visit the practice
- call them
- access services online using the website or the **NHS App**

You can choose how you contact your practice based on what is best for you.

Some may have longer opening hours and some may ask people with urgent requests to contact them in person or by phone and not through online services.

Using a practice's online form

If you use an online form to contact your practice, do not submit the same request more than once and don't call or visit the practice about the same issue unless your condition gets worse.

This helps practices respond more quickly.

You can use the online form for both clinical and non-clinical requests.

Use it for requests that need a response from your practice not for general NHS inquiries. For example, if you are waiting for a hospital appointment, you may need to contact the hospital directly, rather than your general practice.

Give enough information for the practice team to understand your request and get it to the right person.

All practices accept non-urgent online requests. Some practices will also accept urgent requests online. Check your practice's website, leaflet or online system to see how they handle urgent requests.

When your practice is closed

If you need urgent help for your physical or mental health when the practice is closed, and you cannot wait until they open, go online to 111.nhs.uk (https://111.nhs.uk/) or call 111. They will tell you what to do next.

What if it's an emergency?

If it's a serious or life-threatening emergency, call 999 or go straight to A&E (accident and emergency).

What happens when you contact your practice to get an appointment

Whether you make your request by phone, online or by visiting your practice, you may be asked some questions about your health or your request. This will help the practice team understand what help you need.

They will decide what to do based on your clinical needs.

If your request is clinically urgent and is received during the practice's opening hours, you will get a response the same day. This may not always be a same-day appointment, but the practice will take action to help you that day.

Your practice cannot tell you to just call back the next day.

If your request is not clinically urgent, they will tell you what happens next by the end of the next working day.

This could be:

- an appointment that day or on another day
- a phone call that day or on another day
- a text message responding to your request
- advice to visit a pharmacy or another NHS service

Who you might see or speak to

You may be offered a face-to-face appointment, phone call, or a video or online consultation with a GP or another member of the practice staff, such as a nurse or pharmacist.

If you have a carer, they can speak for you if you agree.

You can ask to see a particular healthcare professional. The practice will try to meet your request, but you may need to wait longer for that person to be available.

Seeing the same healthcare professional can be helpful, particularly if you have a long-term condition.

Seeing a GP if you're under 16

If you are under 16, you can ask to see a GP without your parent or guardian. You should be seen and supported by a GP or other clinical staff at the practice.

You can ask for your information to be kept confidential. There are some circumstances where they may need to involve other people to help you. But, in most situations, they should discuss this with you first.

It's usually best to keep the adults you trust involved in your health and care, so the doctor may encourage you to share information. However, unless they think you or others may be at serious risk of harm, they will respect your decisions about privacy.

What if you need extra help?

If you do not speak English, you can ask for interpretation services in your preferred language when you make an appointment.

If you need extra help like longer appointments, a quiet space, wheelchair access, or information in a different format, tell your practice and they will try to help.

If you need extra support to access care, your practice should record this in your health record. They may add a digital flag to show healthcare professionals accessing your record that you need this support.

Other NHS and social care services can use this information to make sure you get the support you need.

You can choose not to have the reasonable adjustment flag on your record.

How do you choose a general practice?

You can:

- call or visit a local practice
- use the NHS website by visiting Find a GP (https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp)

If you want to change to a new general practice you can do so at any time. Most people can choose from more than one practice in their local area.

How to register with a general practice

You can register with a general practice or change your current practice online using the NHS website.

Use Find a GP (https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp) to find practices in your area and choose the one you want to join.

Once you have chosen a practice, you can register online. The form usually takes about 15 minutes to fill in. If you prefer, you can still register using a paper form.

If you have the NHS App, you can use it to change general practice. You must already be registered with a practice to use the NHS App.

Do you need ID or proof of address?

No, you do not need ID, an NHS number or proof of address to register with a general practice or get an appointment.

If you have these details, it can help the practice, but you do not have to provide them.

You can also register with a practice if you are homeless or do not have a fixed address (for example, staying temporarily with friends or family or living in temporary accommodation).

Can a practice say no to registering you?

They must write to you within 14 days if they say no and explain why.

A practice can only say no for a good reason, such as if you live too far away or they are not accepting new patients.

Practices cannot refuse to register you because of immigration status, not having a permanent address, or reasons connected with characteristics protected under equalities legislation.

If you are new to the UK

You can still register with a general practice. It's free to use and your immigration status does not affect your right to register with a general practice.

If you are away from home but still in the UK

If you are staying somewhere else in the UK for more than 24 hours but less than 3 months, you can register as a temporary patient at a practice near where you're staying.

You can also change your nominated pharmacy so you can get your medicine nearby. You can do this through your practice or in the NHS App.

Do general practices charge for anything?

NHS GP services are free.

Sometimes, if you ask the GP to do private work, they may charge a fee. This may include activities such as completing forms for insurance purposes, or writing letters requested by third parties.

How should everyone be treated?

The practice should treat everyone fairly, kindly and respectfully. You should also treat staff with respect. A practice can remove patients from their list if they are violent or abusive to staff.

You can find out more about your rights in the NHS Constitution (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england/the-nhs-constitution-for-england).

Can you choose which hospital or clinic you are referred to?

In most cases, yes.

If your GP refers you for a physical or mental health treatment or care, you have the right to choose which hospital or service you are referred to. This is explained in section 3 of the NHS Choice Framework (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-choice-framework/the-nhs-choice-framework-what-choices-are-available-to-me-in-the-nhs#choosing-where-to-go-for-your-first-appointment-as-an-outpatient).

Sometimes your GP may ask a hospital specialist for advice before deciding whether you need a referral. This is called 'advice and guidance' and helps make sure you get the right care. In some cases, it may mean your condition can be managed without needing a hospital appointment.

If specialist care is needed, your GP can still refer you. If a referral is then made, your right to choose applies as usual.

You can find out more about your right to choose on the NHS website (https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/your-choices-in-the-nhs/). Contact england.choice@nhs.net (mailto:england.choice@nhs.net) if you have questions about your right to choose.

How you can help your general practice

There are simple things you can do to help your general practice provide the right care and support for you.

Prepare for your appointment

Before your appointment, think about your symptoms, what concerns you have and any questions you want to ask. It can help to write these down.

Arrive on time

If you are late for an appointment or unavailable for a scheduled phone call, it can affect other patients and delay care.

Cancel appointments if you need to

If you can't go to your appointment, tell the practice as soon as you can, so that they can offer it to someone else.

Use the NHS App or website

If you're confident using smart phones or computers, you can book or cancel appointments, order repeat prescriptions, and see your GP health record and your test results online.

Turn on notifications

If you use the NHS App, turn on notifications so the practice can contact you more easily. Please keep an eye out for messages.

Order repeat medicines on time

Make sure you ask for repeat prescriptions on time, so you don't run out. Only order what you need.

Join the patient participation group

Your practice will have a group of patients who can offer feedback on the services it delivers. Your practice website should explain how you can join.

How can you view your online GP health record?

You can view your GP health record using the NHS App or another online service provided by your general practice.

You should be able to see information that was recently added to your GP health record, including:

- details of medications
- test results
- records of appointments
- correspondence, such as outpatient clinic letters or discharge summaries

If you cannot see this information or need to access older information in your record, ask your practice to make it available online.

How can you give feedback or raise concerns?

There are several ways to share feedback with your practice:

Friends and Family Test

(View online at the NHS England website (https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/friends-and-family-test-fft/).)

This allows you to share your experience of the care you received.

Speak to the practice manager

If you have feedback or concerns, you can ask to speak to the practice manager.

If you don't feel comfortable doing this, contact your integrated care board (ICB) – the local NHS body that oversees GP practices. You can find your local integrated care board on the NHS England website (https://www.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/about-nhs-services/contact-your-local-integrated-care-board-icb/).

Talk to or join your patient participation group

You can share your feedback with, or join, your practice's patient participation group.

Make a formal complaint

If your concern is more serious, you can make a formal complaint. Find out more about giving feedback and making complaints about NHS services on NHS England's website (https://www.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/feedback-and-complaints/complaint/).

Contact Healthwatch

You can also share your experience with your local Healthwatch. Their job is to make sure NHS leaders and other decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care.

Healthwatch is independent and impartial, and any information you share with them is confidential. Find your local Healthwatch on the Healthwatch website (https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/your-local-healthwatch/list).

Publication reference: PRN02526_i

Date published: 19 October, 2026
Date last updated: 19 October, 2026