

Health and Healthcare

This practical information on how to obtain medical treatment and also explains international students' entitlement to free medical treatment under the UK state health system. It describes the different options such as **Accident & Emergency, visiting your GP** and **hospital appointments**.

Reminder: the accident and emergency department is for emergencies only, if you are unsure you should call **NHS 111** first or visit your pharmacy, they will be able to advise you.

How the UK medical system works

GP (Doctor) surgery or health centre

This is your first point of contact for medical treatment. Most illnesses and other problems can be treated by the GP, but if you need to see a specialist, the GP will refer you to an appropriate hospital department. As well as consultations with a Doctor, most GP's Surgeries and Health Centres provide a range of community health services: for example vaccinations, women's health clinics, services for parents of young children, family planning, contraception and sexual health. GP Surgeries and Health Centres are normally open during the daytime and early evening.

See section 'Register with a GP' below for more information.

Hospital

If your GP refers you to hospital for treatment, you will usually be given an appointment to see a consultant (specialist doctor). Depending on the medical problem, you may be treated as an in-patient (where you are admitted to a ward and stay there overnight or longer) or as an out-patient (where you visit the hospital for an appointment).

If you think you need to see a specialist, you should approach your GP first and ask her or him to refer you.

For information about whether you will have to pay hospital fees, see the information below.

Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department

Some (but not all) hospitals have Accident and Emergency departments. These departments are open 24 hours a day.

If you need immediate medical assistance (for example, because of an accident), telephone **999**. The call is free including from mobile phones. An operator will ask you which emergency service you need (Fire, Police or Ambulance). For urgent medical assistance ask for the ambulance service. Be ready to tell the emergency services what has happened and exactly where you are, especially the street name.

Once you are connected to the Emergency Medical Dispatcher, she or he will ask you questions about the condition of the patient and may offer advice on what to do until the ambulance arrives. If the person is badly injured and needs to go to hospital, an ambulance will be dispatched to take the person to a hospital Accident and Emergency (A&E) department.

If you need urgent treatment, but you are well enough to travel, you should make your own way by bus or taxi to an Accident and Emergency (A&E) department, or ask a friend to take you.

There are no fees for Accident and Emergency services (as long as you are not admitted as an in-patient and do not access follow-up treatment), and you do not have to have paid the immigration health surcharge to use them.

Note: You should only use A&E Departments for emergency treatment for serious illness or injury.

If you feel unwell or have a minor injury, always consider these options before going to A&E:

- Self care – look after yourself at home with a well-stocked medicine cabinet
- Visit your local pharmacy (chemist) – for expert advice on common illnesses and the best medicines to treat them. To find your nearest pharmacy visit www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Pharmacy/LocationSearch
- Ring NHS 111 – 24 hour helpline for medical help and advice. If you are not sure where to go for your illness or injury, ask them.
- Make an appointment with your GP (doctor) - for illnesses that just won't go away

Treatment that is free for everyone

Some treatment provided by the UK's National Health Service (NHS) is free for everyone:

- accident and emergency services (but not follow-up treatment, or admission as an in-patient to hospital)
- family planning services
- diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections
- diagnosis and treatment of certain infectious diseases
- treatment of conditions caused by torture, female genital mutilation, domestic violence or sexual violence (provided you did not come to the UK for the specific purpose of seeking such treatment)
- compulsory psychiatric treatment or treatment that has been ordered by a court

For other treatment, there are fees for “overseas visitors”, including students, but in practice most students do not need to pay. You can see why most students do not need to pay in the next section.

People who don't pay hospital fees

You will be exempt from paying these fees (you will not have to pay them) if you fall into one of the following groups:

- You paid the immigration health surcharge for your current period of immigration permission
- You applied for your current period of immigration permission before the immigration health surcharge was introduced on 6 April 2015
- Babies born in the UK
- You have a right to hospital treatment free of charge because of European law

For example, because you have a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). You need to obtain your EHIC before you come to the UK. You will be entitled to one if you are:

- ✓ a European Economic Area national, stateless person or refugee, or the family member or survivor (irrespective of nationality) of such a person, provided you are insured in an EEA country; or
- ✓ a Swiss or European Union national, stateless person or refugee, or the family member or survivor (irrespective of nationality) of such a person, provided you are insured in Switzerland; or
- ✓ a non-EEA national legally resident and insured in any EU country except Denmark.
- You are a national (or in some cases a resident) of a country with a reciprocal health care agreement with the UK
- You have been granted or have made an application for asylum, humanitarian protection or temporary protection in the UK

- You are a child who is looked after by a local authority
- Armed Forces

Level of hospital fees

If you are an 'overseas visitor' and are not in one of the groups who are exempt from paying fees, you will be charged a high rate for any hospital treatment you receive. You should make sure you have private health insurance from the beginning of your stay.

If you are using the the 6-month 'short-term student' route you should make sure you have private health insurance from the beginning of your stay.

If you are using the 11-month 'short-term student' route and you were not asked to pay the immigration health surcharge when you made your entry clearance application, then you will be entitled to free hospital treatment. This is because the government has temporarily 'waived' the immigration health surcharge for your group. Note that at some point in the future, anyone applying for entry clearance as an 11-month 'short-term student' will be asked to pay the immigration health surcharge when they make their entry clearance application.

Register with a GP

When you arrive in the UK you should register with a local doctor as soon as you can. Do not wait until you are ill.

How to register with a local doctor ('GP', General Practitioner)

When you arrive at your place of study you should register with a local doctor ('GP', General Practitioner) as soon as possible. These doctors are trained and experienced in diagnosing a wide range of health problems. They are based in local offices (called 'GP Surgeries') or Health Centres. You should register with any doctor close to where you live.

To register, you will need to visit the doctor's surgery or clinic during consulting hours, taking a letter from your institution as proof that you are a student, along with your passport and any loose immigration documents. You should ask to be added to the list of National Health Service (NHS) patients. This means you will not have to pay a fee to visit the doctor.

To avoid paying the full (private) cost of treatment make sure the doctor knows you want treatment from the NHS.

Who can register?

- Doctors in England, Wales and Scotland normally accept students who are on courses of any duration onto their lists of NHS patients. They do not apply the same tests that determine whether or not you can have free hospital treatment.

If you fall into any of the following groups you should obtain a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) before coming to the UK, as the doctor is likely to treat you in the same way as a permanent resident (even if you are a short-term visitor):

- 'insured' European Economic Area (EEA) nationals, stateless persons or refugees, their family members and the survivors (irrespective of nationality) of these groups of people, insured in each case in an EEA member state
- 'insured' Swiss or EU nationals, stateless persons or refugees, their family members and the survivors (irrespective of nationality) of these groups of people, insured in each case in Switzerland
- non-EEA nationals legally resident and 'insured' in any EU country except Denmark

'Insured' in this context means that you qualify for state-funded healthcare in the EEA or Swiss state where you live.

If the doctor accepts you as a patient you will be sent a medical card through the post with your NHS number. However, being registered with a GP (doctor), and having an NHS number, does not give you automatic entitlement to free hospital treatment. The hospital providing treatment is responsible for establishing whether international students are entitled to free hospital treatment.

Dental treatment

You should try to have your teeth checked by a dentist at least once a year.

You should ask the dentist whether they accept National Health Service (NHS) patients - many do not. The dentist may wish to conduct the same process for checking your entitlement to NHS care as a General Practitioner (GP) would. If you already have a GP, then the dental practice should contact the GP to ensure that they have undertaken an entitlement check. If accepted by the dentist as an NHS patient, you will need to give the dentist the NHS number on your medical card.

If you are entitled to NHS treatment, you may still have to make a contribution towards the cost of your dental treatment. If you are not entitled to NHS treatment, or the dentist you choose does not take NHS patients (some dentists will only accept private patients), you will have to pay for the full cost of your treatment.

Eye tests and eye care

Eye care is provided by opticians who usually operate from high street shops. You will normally have to pay a minimum charge for an eye test on the NHS (around £20) unless you are under 19 and in full-time study. If the test shows you need glasses or contact lenses, the optician will give you a prescription. The cost of frames and lenses varies considerably.

Insurance

Even if you are entitled to free NHS treatment whilst in the UK, you should consider taking out insurance which covers other medical-related costs. An insurance policy may cover, for example:

- lost fees if you are unable to complete your course;
- costs of returning home if a relative is ill;
- costs of a relative visiting you in the UK if you fall ill;
- cost of returning to your home country for treatment;
- or in the worst possible situation, returning a body home for burial.

There is often a long wait for NHS treatment, sometimes many months. An insurance policy which gives you access to private medical care could give you much quicker access to the treatment you need.

If you already have medical insurance in your home country, check whether you can extend it to cover your stay in the UK, as well as looking at options available from UK insurers.