

Can international students in the UK use the NHS?

If you're a full-time international student studying in the UK for a period longer than six months, you are eligible to use NHS services.

If you are studying for a period of less than six months, you will not be eligible to use NHS services. If this is the case for you, it's advised that you take out private health insurance cover during your stay.

How much does it cost to use the NHS as an international student?

Hospital treatment is free to people who are "ordinarily resident" in the UK.

To be considered ordinarily resident and entitled to free hospital treatment, you must be living in the UK on a lawful and properly settled basis for the time being. You may be asked to prove this.

You cannot be considered ordinarily resident in the UK unless you have indefinite leave to remain or status under the EU Settlement Scheme.

If you're a visitor from the EU, even if you're a former UK resident, you can use your EHIC, PRC or S2 when visiting the UK. If you cannot provide these documents, you may be charged for your care.

If you're a visitor from Norway, you can get medically necessary healthcare using your Norwegian passport.

If you're a visitor from Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein or Switzerland whose visit to the UK began on or before 31 December 2020, you may continue to use your EHIC or PRC in the UK for the duration of your visit. You also may complete planned treatment using your S2, as long as authorisation for this was requested from the relevant health authority before 31 December 2020.

If you're visiting from Iceland, Liechtenstein or Switzerland you may be charged for NHS healthcare. You should check with the relevant health authority where you live before travelling to the UK.

To use the NHS as an international student, you will be required to pay an immigration health surcharge (IHS), which costs £470 per year of your intended stay. If your visa duration contains part of a year that is six months or less then you will be required to pay £235 for that portion of your stay.

This cost must be paid as part of your student visa application and cannot be avoided, even if you choose to take out private medical insurance once you arrive.

Once you have paid this, you are eligible to use the following NHS services free of charge:

- A&E (accident and emergency) services
- NHS hospital treatment
- GP services
- Sexual health, family planning and contraceptive services
- Diagnosis and treatment of certain infectious diseases
- Treatment of any conditions caused by domestic violence or sexual violence
- Some palliative care services

- Psychiatric treatment or treatment that has been ordered by a court
- Covid-19 tests and treatment, as well as vaccination against Covid-19.

If a doctor prescribes a medicine to you, you can get this sent to a local pharmacy for collection.

The cost of that prescription depends on where in the UK you are registered.

In England, prescriptions cost £9.65 per item unless you are under 19 and in full-time education, over 60 or pregnant. If you fall into any of these categories, your prescription will be free.

Prescription costs are paid upon collection of the medicine at your local pharmacy.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, prescriptions are free of charge in most cases.

How do I register for the NHS and get an NHS number?

Though you will have already paid your immigrant health surcharge as part of your student visa, once you arrive in the UK, you will need to register with a general practitioner (GP) at a local doctor's surgery or medical centre before you can access NHS services.

You will receive an NHS number when you register with a GP.

It is advisable to register with a GP as soon as you arrive; don't wait until you fall ill.

You can use the [NHS search tool](#) to find your nearest GP service, we have also attached a full list to this handbook.

To register with a GP, you will need to visit your local doctor's surgery, clinic or medical centre during consulting hours with the following documents:

- A letter from your university proving your enrolment to the institution
- Your passport
- Any further immigration or visa documents.

Often, your university will have an affiliated medical centre you can register with or they will let you know which GPs in the area are open to taking new patients and what their hours are. This will usually be addressed during your freshers or orientation week.

When you register, make sure to ask to be added to the list of National Health Service (NHS) patients.

Most GP surgeries will have female and male doctors. You can state whether you would prefer to see a male or female doctor when booking any future GP appointments. Depending on what you are booking an appointment for, you might also be booked in with a practice nurse, who can treat and advise on a range of minor illnesses.

Is my NHS number the same as my National Insurance (NI) number?

International students might get confused between their NHS number and their National Insurance number. They are different.

Your NHS number is given to you once you register with a GP and is used to prove that you are eligible for NHS services in the UK.

Your National Insurance number has nothing to do with accessing health services. Instead, this number is used for administration around national insurance fees, benefits, employment and taxes.

I brought my family with me to the UK on my international student visa. Can they use the NHS?

If you have brought a spouse, civil partner or children with you to the UK, they will be entitled to free NHS hospital treatment, but only if they are dependants with their own visas.

Each dependant will have to pay the immigrant health surcharge individually and register with a GP to access the full services offered by the NHS.

Are dental care and eyecare free on the NHS?

It is possible to access some dental services through the NHS but waiting lists can be extremely long and lots of dental practices will not accept NHS patients.

If a local dentist practice is accepting NHS patients, they will usually ask for your NHS number and contact your GP to check the care you are entitled to.

Even if you are entitled to dental care through the NHS, you might still have to pay for some dental procedures or services.

The other option for dental care in the UK is to pay for a private service or take up an insurance policy such as Denplan.

Eyecare is provided by opticians who are separate from GP surgeries and often operate from high-street shops such as Specsavers or pharmacies such as Boots.

You will normally have to pay a minimum charge of about £20-£25 for an eye test on the NHS in England, but eye tests are free in Scotland. If you need glasses or contact lenses, the optician will give you a prescription, which you pay for yourself. Beyond that, the cost of frames and lenses varies considerably (alongside your budget and taste).

Certain groups may be eligible for free eye tests.

There might be variations in the services and costs in England, Wales and Scotland, so be sure to check those with your GP when accessing services.

Other services

Before you make an appointment with your GP surgery, think about what other services might be able to help.

- Go to a pharmacy for advice and treatment for common illnesses, aches and pains that do not need a prescription.

As qualified healthcare professionals, they can offer clinical advice and over-the-counter medicines for a range of minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, sore throats, tummy trouble and aches and pains.

If symptoms suggest it's something more serious, pharmacists have the right training to make sure you get the help you need. For example they will tell you if you need to see a GP, nurse or other healthcare professional.

All pharmacists train for 5 years in the use of medicines. They are also trained in managing minor illnesses and providing health and wellbeing advice.

Many pharmacies are open until late and at weekends. You do not need an appointment.

Most pharmacies have a private consultation room where you can discuss issues with pharmacy staff without being overheard.

- Call NHS 111 if you have an urgent medical problem, but you're not sure what to do.
- Visit [111 online](#) for urgent medical advice for people aged 5 and over only.
- Visit a [sexual health clinic](#) for testing for sexually transmitted infections and contraception advice.

You do not have to make an appointment or register for these services.