

# Patient exemption checking

## A guide for pharmacy teams in England

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## Purpose

This guide for pharmacy team members sets out how and why it is important to check a patient's exemption status.

## Background

Not all benefits entitle people to free prescriptions. The rules around entitlement to free prescriptions can be difficult for some patients to understand. They may need help to correctly claim free NHS prescriptions and avoid penalty charges.

If a patient incorrectly claims free NHS prescriptions, and they subsequently aren't able to prove their exemption, they could face a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) of up to £100 as well as the original prescription charge.

Receiving a PCN incorrectly can cause inconvenience and distress for a patient. Pharmacy staff already play a key role in checking prescriptions and this toolkit will help to support you.

## Who is exempt?

Some people are automatically entitled to free NHS prescriptions. Other patients may be entitled to free prescriptions if they have certain medical conditions and hold a valid exemption certificate, or receive certain types of benefits.

A full list of exemption categories, along with the evidence patients need to show their entitlement, can be found here: [www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-nhs-prescription-costs/free-nhs-prescriptions](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-nhs-prescription-costs/free-nhs-prescriptions)

Patients can find out if they're entitled to free NHS prescriptions, NHS dental treatment and help with other NHS costs using the online eligibility checker: [www.nhs.uk/CheckBeforeYouTick](http://www.nhs.uk/CheckBeforeYouTick)

## How to check a patient's exemption status

A patient's exemption status applies at the time of dispensing – the point at which the patient collects their medication.

Any time a patient makes a declaration that they are exempt from paying an NHS prescription charge, pharmacy staff must ask them to sign a declaration and produce evidence.

Pharmacies must advise the person claiming exemption from prescription charges, where evidence is required but not provided, that the NHS undertakes checks to verify that such persons are eligible for free prescriptions. **This is a legislative requirement of your terms of service** under [paragraph 7](#).

## If the patient makes an exempt declaration

Every time a patient has marked a line in one box on the back of the paper FP10/token:

- ask to see evidence of their eligibility
- ask them to sign the declaration box on the paper FP10/token
- when submitting an EPS claim, make sure you specify the correct exemption category and indicate whether evidence was seen
- if the patient shows a valid exemption certificate, note this on your PMR system along with the expiry date of the certificate

Your dispensing system will automatically calculate the patient's exemption status.

## If the patient does not provide evidence

If the patient does not provide evidence of their entitlement to free prescriptions:

- **do not refuse to dispense items**
- put an X in the 'Evidence not seen' box on the back of the paper FP10/token
- advise the patient that NHS checks are routinely undertaken to verify that people are exempt from payment of NHS prescriptions charges to prevent and detect fraud or error – this is a legislative requirement under the pharmacy's terms of service
- when submitting an EPS claim, make sure you specify the correct exemption category and indicate if evidence was seen

## If the patient is unsure of their entitlement

If the patient is unsure if they are entitled to free prescriptions:

- ask them to pay for the prescription
- give them an FP57 refund form and explain they can claim a refund within three months
- explain that they can find out if they're entitled to free NHS prescriptions, NHS dental treatment and help with other NHS costs using the online eligibility checker at: [www.nhs.uk/CheckBeforeYouTick](http://www.nhs.uk/CheckBeforeYouTick)
- tell them about exemption certificates; why they are required and how to apply

If a patient later finds out they are eligible for free prescriptions, they can claim a refund within three months of the date the prescription charge was paid. If more than three months have elapsed, the refund may not be paid unless the patient has a LIS04(P) form. Further information can be found in [Part XVI of the Drug Tariff](#).

You can also tell patients currently paying for their prescriptions that they may benefit from buying a Prescription Prepayment Certificate (PPC):

[www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/ppc](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/ppc).

## Signing the declaration

If a patient makes a declaration that they are exempt from paying NHS prescription charges, they must sign the reverse of the paper FP10/token. The pharmacy should check the reverse of every exempt prescription to ensure that:

- An exemption box has been clearly marked with a line in the 'If you didn't pay' section on the back of the paper FP10/token
- The patient has signed the signature box of the declaration

Patients are not required to make a signed declaration if:

- they are age exempt (and the patient's age is computer printed on the front of the script)
- all items present on the prescription are 'free-of-charge'
- the prescription is for 'Prisoners on Release'
- the prescription has been confirmed as exempt by the Real Time Exemption Checking (RTEC) system

### **Free-of-charge (FOC) contraceptive items**

Box X, 'was prescribed free-of-charge contraceptives', has been removed from the paper FP10/FP10DT token. The NHSBSA automatically identifies contraceptive items listed in Part XVI of the Drug Tariff as FOC.

For items not listed in Part XVI that may be used for contraceptive purposes, the prescriber must endorse the prescription with CC, OC, or the female symbol (♀) to indicate that no prescription charge should be incurred.

If the only item(s) on the prescription are FOC contraceptives, or for contraceptive purposes endorsed CC, OC or ♀ or endorsed with FS:

- the patient doesn't need to make a declaration
- you don't need to submit an EPS token to the NHSBSA

Before you submit your claim to us for payment you need to populate the relevant FOC exemption code in the EPS claim. Some systems handle these exemptions automatically, so you may not need to specify a patient exemption.

We automatically handle all FOC items regardless of the charge or exempt status in the EPS claim.

### **FOC treatments for sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**

When a patient is prescribed FOC sexual health treatment, the prescriber should endorse the item FS to indicate that it is a free supply, and no prescription charge should be incurred.

If the prescription is EPS, FS must be present in the prescriber endorsement field.

There is no patient tick box for FOC sexual health treatment on the reverse of the FP10/FP10DT token.

The new code 0017 'was prescribed FOC sexual health medication' is being added to EPS systems.

If the only item(s) on the prescription are FOC contraceptives, or for contraceptive purposes endorsed CC, OC or ♀ or endorsed with FS:

- the patient doesn't need to make a declaration
- you don't need to submit an EPS token to the NHSBSA

Before you submit your claim to us for payment you need to populate the relevant FOC exemption code in the EPS claim. Some systems handle these exemptions automatically, so you may not need to specify a patient exemption.

We automatically handle all FOC items regardless of the charge or exempt status in the EPS claim.

### **Prisoners on Release - EPS code 0015**

People who have just been released from prison do not have to pay for NHS prescriptions. This only applies to prescriptions issued by prison doctors until the patient registers with a GP.

To be classed as exempt, the prescription must have 'HMP' printed in the box for the practice address at the front of the prescription form. In these instances, the patient does **not** need to complete a signed declaration on the back of the form.

**EPS exemption category 0015** is for the processing of HMP prisoners on release.

On some dispensing systems this category is worded in a misleading way, for example 'patient does not have to pay a prescription charge'. Exemption category 0015 should only be used for the processing of HMP prisoners on release.

## Real Time Exemption Checking (RTEC)

Real Time Exemption Checking (RTEC) is an NHS electronic system which allows pharmacies to immediately check if a patient is eligible for free prescriptions.

The service applies to prescriptions sent by EPS. It enables your PMR system to automatically check whether a patient has a known exemption that can be automatically applied.

<b>Prescription confirmed by RTEC as exempt</b>	<b>Prescription not confirmed by RTEC as exempt</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No further prescription exemption checks required</li><li>• Patient doesn't need to complete a declaration on an EPS token</li><li>• You don't need to submit an EPS token to the NHSBSA</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Follow the normal exemption checking process</li><li>• If the patient believes they are exempt from prescription charges, ask them to make a declaration on the EPS token</li><li>• Submit the EPS token to the NHSBSA</li></ul>

For further information about RTEC and how to register, visit the [Real Time Exemption Checking \(RTEC\) page on the PSNC's website](#)

## Submitting EPS tokens to the NHSBSA

All EPS tokens must be submitted to the NHSBSA, unless:

- the patient is age exempt (and the patient's age is computer printed on the front of the script)
- the prescription contains FOC items only
- the prescription has been confirmed as exempt by the RTEC system

You do not need to sort your EPS tokens, but you must bundle them separately from your paper FP10 submissions when you send them to the NHSBSA.

## Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)

It is the patient's responsibility to make sure the correct box is marked on the back of their prescription claim form.

This is the case regardless of whether it is marked by:

- the patient
- someone on the patient's behalf
- pharmacy staff

At the NHSBSA, we are responsible for checking claims for free NHS prescriptions and recovering charges from patients who incorrectly claim they do not have to pay.

NHS Penalty Charge Notices are issued in accordance with the [National Health Service \(Penalty Charge\) Regulations 1999](#).

If a patient is sent a PCN, they'll be asked to pay the original NHS prescription cost, and an additional penalty charge. The penalty charge is five times the original amount owed, up to a maximum of £100.

For more information, visit: [www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-penalty-charges](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-penalty-charges)

To ensure that they correctly claim for exemptions, you can help patients by displaying information including on posters, guidance booklets and counter cards.

## Help and support

For more information, visit [www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/freeprescriptions](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/freeprescriptions) or contact us at [nhsbsa.pharmacysupport@nhs.net](mailto:nhsbsa.pharmacysupport@nhs.net)

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