

Dispensing Factsheet: Checking Prescription Exemption Status

What pharmacy staff must do

Pharmacy staff are reminded that unless patients are exempt by age and the date of birth on the prescription is computer generated, the patient is required to complete the exemption declaration and pharmacies are required to check for proof of a patient's exemption status at the point of dispensing.

At the point at which the patient is asked to declare their exemption and the patient makes a declaration on the back of the prescription form, the patient must hold the required proof of exemption, and this must be within its period of validity – pharmacy staff are expected to check evidence of entitlement.



If the patient is unsure of whether they are entitled to free prescriptions, pharmacy staff should ask them to pay for the prescription, and issue them with an FP57 prescription receipt and refund form and signpost them to information on how they can obtain the necessary certificate. This enables the patient to receive a refund of paid prescription charges once they have obtained the necessary certificate, assuming it covers the time period when the prescription was dispensed. This can be processed at any community pharmacy up to three after the prescription has been dispensed.

Where appropriate, pharmacy staff should advise patients of the required certificates and how they might go about obtaining them (e.g. Medical Exemption Certificates required for patients suffering from diabetes, epilepsy etc, as well as exemption certificates on maternity grounds, low income, or Prescription Prepayment Certificates (PPC)).

Where patients do not have evidence of their exemption or where there is doubt over whether the evidence provided is appropriate, the "Evidence not Seen" box on the back of the prescription should be marked with an X by pharmacy staff. Pharmacy staff need not refuse to dispense items on the basis that the patient does not provide evidence of their entitlement to free prescriptions.

Patient obligations

The patient is responsible for the accuracy of the declaration they make. NHS Protect has a responsibility to check for prescription charge exemption fraud and patients found to have wrongly claimed for free prescriptions could face a penalty charge and in some cases prosecution. This applies even where the patient has a medical condition which qualifies for exemption if the patient does not have a valid exemption certificate on the date the patient is asked to pay or if they do not complete the exemption declaration.

The table below outlines:

- exemption categories;
- who is eligible for each category;
- what proof of exemption they can present; and
- how they can obtain the required proof.

Pharmacy staff may consider holding application forms for some of the certificates such as those for patients who may be eligible for the NHS low income scheme or prescription prepayments.

Exemption category	Who is exempt?	Proof required	How to obtain the required proof
Age exempt	Children under 16 years of age and men and women aged 60 years and over are entitled to free prescriptions.	If the patient is age exempt and their date of birth (d.o.b) is computer generated on the prescription or included in the electronic prescription message, the patient is not required to complete the exemption declaration and no evidence is required. If the d.o.b is hand-written or not computer printed on the prescription, the patient must complete the exemption declaration. Evidence that could be shown includes a passport, birth certificate, or any other official papers showing the patient's name and d.o.b. For children under 16, if the child is obviously under 16, no evidence is required.	N/A

Exemption category	Who is exempt?	Proof required	How to obtain the required proof
Full-time students aged 16, 17 or 18	Must be aged 16, 17 or 18 and in full-time education. Full-time education means you must be receiving full-time instruction from a recognised educational establishment, such as a school, college or university; therefore those young adults who are undertaking apprenticeships are not eligible. (However patients may qualify for a HC2 certificate under the NHS Low Income Scheme)	Evidence that should be shown is proof of the patient's date of birth (see above) and proof that the patient is a full-time student (e.g. Student Card or letter from school/college).	Proof can be obtained from the patient's school, college, university or local education authority (LEA).
Patients who have a valid Maternity Exemption Certificate	Pregnant women and those who have had a baby in the past 12 months get free prescriptions if they have a valid Maternity Exemption Certificate.	If a pregnancy ends in a miscarriage before the 24th week of pregnancy, the Maternity Exemption Certificate ceases to be valid. If the miscarriage occurs after the 24th week of pregnancy, the Maternity Exemption Certificate remains valid until its expiry date. If a woman has had a stillbirth, she will still have entitlement to exemption from NHS prescription charges up to 12 months after the stillbirth. Generally, the patient will still hold an NHS Maternity Exemption Certificate; this is acceptable as evidence of exemption until the date of expiry. The patient should also have a certificate of stillbirth but is unlikely to carry it with her. If the patient is distressed or hesitant, remember that the patient is not obliged to produce evidence. Simply mark the "Evidence not seen" box.	Patients are required to complete a FW8 form available from GPs, midwives and health visitors. The GP, midwife or health professional is required to sign the form and send it off to the Pricing Authority who will issue the certificate. More information is available on their website tinyurl.com/bsafw8
Patients who have a valid Medical Exemption Certificate	To claim exemption under this category, it is necessary for the patient to have a valid Medical Exemption Certificate, not simply a medical condition.	The list of conditions which would entitle a patient to a Medical Exemption Certificate can be found in Part XVI of the Drug Tariff. Medical Exemption Certificates are typically, although not uniformly, valid for five years. Note: a Medical Exemption Certificate is always required – the fact that a patient has one of the qualifying conditions is not sufficient to claim entitlement to exemption from the charge.	Patients are required to complete a FP92A form which is available from GP practices. The GP is required to sign the form and send it off to the Pricing Authority who will issue the certificate. More information is available on their website tinyurl.com/bsacosts
Patients who have a valid Prescription Pre-payment Certificate (PPC)	Anyone can purchase a PPC.	Appropriate evidence of exemption would be the certificate itself. Note: Patients may backdate their PPC up to one month from the date that they apply. If the patient intends to buy a PPC, they should be asked to pay for their prescription, provided with the FP57 Receipt and advised on how to obtain a refund. (<i>Pharmacies can obtain copies of Form FP95 PPC application leaflet from NHS England</i>).	Patients can obtain a PPC by completing a FP95 form which is available from pharmacies and GP practices. Pharmacies can obtain copies of the FP95 form from NHS England tinyurl.com/nhsareateam Alternatively, patients can order a PPC over the telephone with a credit or debit card (0300 0330 1341) or from the NHSBSA website tinyurl.com/help-costs Pharmacies can also register to sell PPCs; for further information see tinyurl.com/help-costs The Pricing Authority is responsible for issuing PPCs. More information is available on their website tinyurl.com/nhsbsa-ppc

Exemption category	Who is exempt?	Proof required	How to obtain the required proof
The patient is named on a current HC2 Charges Certificate	Anyone on a low income can apply to get this certificate.	Appropriate evidence of exemption would be the certificate itself. Patients who are not entitled to help with health costs under any other category may apply for help under the NHS Low Income Scheme.	Patients may claim for help with health costs under the NHS Low Income Scheme using the HC1 form, obtainable from Jobcentre Plus Office or by calling 0300 330 1343. HC1 forms may also be available from the local hospital, dentist, optician or GP practice. Pharmacies can obtain copies of Form HC1 by calling 3M Supplies on 0300 123 0849 Option 1. The Pricing Authority administer the NHS Low Income Scheme; more information is available on their website tinyurl.com/nhshc1
The patient or his/her partner is entitled to, or named on, a valid NHS Tax Credit (TC) Exemption Certificate	Not all patients receiving tax credits are entitled to free prescriptions – those patients that are entitled are automatically sent an 'NHS Tax Credit Exemption Certificate' by the Pricing Authority.	Appropriate proof of exemption would be the NHS TC Exemption Certificate.	Exemption certificates are sent automatically to eligible patients. Patients who are unsure as to whether they are entitled to help with health costs via tax credits can contact HM Revenue and Customs for support: 0845 300 3900.
The patient or his/her partner is receiving Income Support (IS)	Exemption certificates are sent automatically to eligible patients.	Note some letters and documents issued by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) about income support, while relating to the patient (or their partner), do not show dates of entitlement therefore these are not acceptable evidence. An entitlement letter from the Jobcentre Plus Office would be appropriate evidence of exemption.	Patients can speak to their Jobcentre Plus Office.
People receiving income based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA)	Note there are two types of JSA, income based and contribution based. Only receipt of income based JSA entitles patients to free prescriptions.	JSA is paid by giro cheque or BACs two weeks in arrears so patients may not have evidence. A letter from the Department of Social Security (DSS)/patient's local Job Centre Plus Office that states their entitlement would be appropriate evidence. The letter must confirm that the patient was entitled to free prescriptions on the date the patient completed the exemption declaration.	Patients can speak to their Jobcentre Plus Office.
Universal Credit (UC)	As part of the government's changes to the benefit system, UC is a new benefit introduced from April 2013. Those receiving this benefit are eligible for free prescriptions.	A valid UC award letter bearing their name (either as the recipient or because they are a partner or child of the recipient) is appropriate proof; they should sign to declare their exemption and will need to tick the box for " income based Jobseeker's Allowance ".	For further information tinyurl.com/costsuni
The patient or his/her partner is getting Pension Credit Guarantee Credit (PCGC)	Those in receipt of PCGC.	A letter from the DSS/patient's local Job Centre Plus Office would be appropriate proof. The letter must confirm that the patient was entitled to free prescriptions on the date the patient completed the exemption declaration.	Patients can speak to their Jobcentre Plus Office.

Exemption category	Who is exempt?	Proof required	How to obtain the required proof
The patient is a war pensioner holding a War Pension Exemption Certificate and the prescription is for the accepted disablement	Those holding a War Pension Exemption Certificate.	Appropriate proof of exemption would be a War Pension Exemption Certificate.	Patients can apply for a War Pension Exemption Certificate by writing to The Veterans Agency, Norcross, Blackpool FY5 3WP or by telephoning 0800 169 2277.
Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)	Only patients receiving the income related strand of ESA will be entitled to free prescriptions.	The patient should be able to provide evidence in the form of a DWP award notice.	Patients can speak to their Jobcentre Plus Office.
Prisoners on release	Prisoners on release and those released from secure accommodation (secure accommodation is defined as a court, a secure training centre or a secure children's home) who present an FP10 or FP10 (MDA).	The letters 'HMP', and the prison or secure accommodation address and telephone number must be printed in the box provided for the practice address on the front of the form, along with the prescribing code and the cost centre code for the organisation.	N/A

Other Useful Resources

Form/leaflet	What it is used for	How to obtain it
HC12	Quick guide to how patients can receive help with the cost of NHS services including prescription charges.	Contact 3M Supplies on 0300 123 0849 Option 1.
HC10	Help with health costs poster.	Contact 3M Supplies on 0300 123 0849 Option 1.
Claiming free prescriptions? Booklet and poster	Display in the pharmacy to alert patients to when they are entitled to free NHS prescriptions.	These were sent out to all community pharmacies by the NHSBSA. To obtain further copies visit the NHSBSA website (tiny.url/claimingbooklet).

Some useful links

For further information visit the PSNC page on exemptions – psnc.org.uk/exemptions

NHSBSA Help with Health Costs – ppa.org.uk/ppc

Dispensing factsheets

You may have noticed that since last year we have been publishing one new dispensing related factsheet every month in our CPN magazine. What you might not know is that they are now all available to download from our website.

Previous factsheets have covered such topics as:

- Unlicensed specials and imports;
- Charges and exemptions;
- Using the Drug Tariff; and
- Where to obtain external resources.

If you missed any of these factsheets, or want additional copies, download them now at: dld.bz/dqNet

