

NHS Number



Frequently Asked Questions For patients

This document answers your frequently asked questions about the NHS Number. If you have any comments or you need more information, please contact the NHS Number team at nhsnumber@nhs.net or visit www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/systemsandservices/nhsnumber/

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1 The NHS Number

1.1 What is an NHS Number?

An NHS Number is a unique 10-digit number, given to everyone registered with the NHS in England and Wales. Your NHS Number helps healthcare staff find your care records and provide you with better, safer care.

The NHS Number is shown in a '3-3-4' format and would look something like this.

9	4	3		4	7	6		5	9	1	9
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(This is an example number only)

(This NHS Number is only an example and you should not use it as your own NHS Number)

The 10-digit NHS Number was introduced in 1996 and replaced a lot of different versions that included both letters and numbers.

Using your NHS Number is a better way of finding information than using your name and date of birth, particularly in NHS computer systems and will help to avoid mistaking you for another patient, which can easily be caused by misspelling names or by people having the same or similar names.

1.2 Who has an NHS Number and how is it chosen?

Anyone born in England, Wales or the Isle of Man since October 2002 has an NHS Number. Babies' NHS Numbers are chosen by a system called NHS Numbers for Babies (NN4B). The numbers are random and NHS Numbers previously used will never be reused. The maternity unit will tell the mother their baby's NHS Number, usually by printing out a label containing the baby's details and NHS Number. This label may be attached:

- to a leaflet called 'NHS Number – From Birth for Life'
- to a letter or form, or
- inside the baby's 'Red Book'.

Anyone registered with a GP Practice in England and Wales since 1996 has an NHS Number. Your NHS Number will be sent to you when you register at a GP Practice either by the GP Practice themselves or by their primary care trust (PCT). If your PCT still issue medical cards, you will receive a medical card when you register with a GP Practice. The medical card will include your NHS Number.

If you registered with a GP Practice in England or Wales before 1996, you will have been given an old- style NHS Number made of both letters and numbers. This has now been replaced by a new NHS Number made up of numbers. You

should only use your 10-digit NHS Number from now on (see 1.3 for details of how to get your new number).

There are only a few people without an NHS Number and this is normally because they have had no previous contact with the NHS. If an NHS organisation can't find your NHS Number is probably because you haven't been properly identified and not because you don't have an NHS Number.

1.3 How do I find my NHS Number?

If you are, or ever have been, registered with a GP Practice in England or Wales you have an NHS Number. You should be able to find your NHS Number on your medical card or on a recent letter or other document from the NHS. Your GP Practice should also be able to give you your NHS Number.

If you still can't find your NHS number, or you have an old-style number and want to know your new one, you can ask your local PCT to look it up.

If you want to find out the phone number for your nearest PCT, visit the NHS Choices website at the following address and enter your postcode.

<http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust>

When you phone your local PCT, ask for the department that deals with NHS Number enquiries. Registration staff will take your name, date of birth and address and then send you a medical card with your NHS Number on it, usually within two days.

If you have never been registered with a GP Practice in England or Wales you will not have an NHS Number. When you register with a GP Practice you will be given an NHS Number. You can either go to a GP Practice to register or ask your local PCT to register you with a local doctor.

1.4 Is my NHS Number the same as my National Insurance number?

No, your NHS Number is different from your National Insurance (NI) number, which is used for tax, benefits and pensions. If you have any questions about your NI number, contact the local office of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). To find your local office, visit www.dwp.gov.uk.

The National Insurance number is not used for health reasons because not everybody has a National Insurance number (for example, children under 16).

1.5 Why is the NHS Number important?

Your NHS Number is unique to you, will always identify you correctly and is an important step towards providing you with better, safer care. Your NHS Number helps healthcare providers (such as a doctor or a hospital) match your records to

you and be more accurate when passing information to other healthcare providers. This will help avoid you being mistaken for another patient or your information being recorded on another patient's file.

If you know your NHS Number, or can show something that has your NHS Number, you can help healthcare staff find your records more easily and share them safely with others who are caring for you. For example, your medical card, a prescription or an appointment letter from us should include your NHS Number.

You could also start checking things the NHS send you to make sure they have the right NHS Number. If you notice the NHS Number is wrong you should contact whoever has quoted an incorrect NHS Number. You should also give them your right NHS Number.

1.6 I have changed my name: does this affect my NHS number?

No, moving or changing your name does not affect or change your NHS Number, which stays with you throughout your life. You will need to arrange for your new name to be updated on your medical records.

To do this, contact your GP Practice and let them know about your name change. They may ask to see some identification or proof of the name change. Your GP Practice will make sure your medical records are updated.

1.7 Do I need to know my NHS Number if I use a GP Practice I'm not registered with?

No, but having it with you makes things easier. If you use general practice services and do not have your NHS Number practice staff can find it in another way.

1.8 Do I need to know my NHS Number to get care?

No, you don't need to know your NHS Number to receive care, but it can help if you are able to give it to our staff who need to find your health records. This will help avoid you being mistaken for another patient or your information being recorded on another patient's file. You may want to keep your NHS Number somewhere safe where you can easily find it.

1.9 I have a hospital number, do I also need an NHS Number?

Hospital numbers and other local ways of identifying you are only used by the hospital or healthcare provider. An NHS Number is the only national unique way of identifying you (in England and Wales) which stays the same wherever you are getting care.

You may get care from many different NHS organisations. NHS Numbers are very important because they make sure there is safe and secure communication across different organisations and help avoid one person's information being recorded on another patient's file.

Here is an example of a mix-up

A patient referral letter was given to a clerk to make an appointment. This patient was mixed up with another patient who had a similar name. The referral letter had the wrong patient details but the right hospital number handwritten on the top of the letter. This appointment letter ended up going to the wrong patient and the patient missed their appointment. This mix-up then had to be explained to both patients and a new appointment had to be made.

1.10 How does my Number work?

When you visit a doctor or go to a hospital or clinic for treatment, they can get your NHS Number in a number of ways. They can get it from:

- your medical card
- a prescription
- a recent letter or appointment card, or
- their computer system.

If they don't already have your NHS Number they will add it to their records.

Only authorised healthcare staff can read your personal details to find your NHS Number. We will follow strict privacy and security procedures when we handle your health information. If we need to give your health information to another healthcare provider (for example if you are being referred elsewhere or leaving hospital), we will include your NHS Number to help them find your records more easily.

Using your unique NHS Number is better than using your name and date of birth to find information, particularly in our computer systems, and will help to avoid mistakes which can be caused by misspelling names or by people having the same or similar names.

1.11 What can the NHS use my NHS Number for?

Healthcare providers and other healthcare professionals will use your NHS Number for passing on and managing health information to provide you with better, safer and more efficient healthcare.

Some private health insurance companies use NHS Numbers to provide healthcare services, such as chronic disease management programmes.

NHS Numbers cannot be used for any other reason, such as insurance or employment purposes.

Anyone who uses NHS Numbers has to do so in line with existing privacy rules and the Data Protection Act.

1.12 Is my NHS Number a health record?

NHS Numbers are not a health record and don't hold any clinical information about you. NHS Numbers are held on your records as a unique way to match you to your medical records when you need care.

Having NHS Numbers on a health record system or on your record does not change how and when healthcare providers share information about you, but it does mean they can identify your records more accurately

1.13 I seem to have more than one NHS Number, which one is correct?

Your NHS Number is made up of a 10-digit numbers. If one of your NHS Numbers has both letters and numbers it is an old NHS Number which you can no longer use.

If you have more than one 10-digit number you should contact your primary care trust (PCT) to find out which is one is the right number.

To find out the phone number for your nearest PCT visit the NHS Choices website at the following address and enter your postcode.

<http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust>

When you phone your local PCT, ask for the department which deals with enquiries about NHS Number. A member of staff will take your name, date of birth and address and then send you a medical card with your NHS Number on it, usually within two days.

We also recommend that you tell the organisations that have two different numbers so that they can find out which is the right NHS Number and change their records.

Healthcare providers use other numbers and ways of identifying you and these may also be in your documents. In an emergency, if a provider can't identify who you are they won't have your NHS Number and will use another way of identifying you instead. As soon as healthcare staff can identify you they will find your NHS Number and add it to your records.

1.14 How will my NHS Number improve my care?

NHS Numbers will improve safety, security and efficiency by making sure your information is linked to the right record.

There are four main areas where your NHS Number helps you.

- **Discharge summaries.** When you leave hospital and information about your ongoing care is sent to your doctor (or other healthcare provider), they will be able to match your information to you.

- **Pathology tests.** When your test results are sent to your doctor (or other healthcare provider), they will be able to match the test results to your patient record.
- **Prescriptions.** Pharmacists can be more confident when receiving electronic prescriptions or reviewing paper prescriptions that they are matched to you, so that you get the right medication.
- **Referrals.** When patient records and case histories are sent between the healthcare provider who refers you elsewhere for care (for example your doctor) and a specialist, the specialist can check they have your correct information.

If a healthcare provider such as your doctor needs to pass information to another healthcare provider as part of providing you with care, your NHS Number will clearly identify that the information is about you.

1.15 Will I still be able to use healthcare services without giving my details?

NHS Number don't change the way healthcare services are provided. Where it is legal and practical, you can get treatment and services without giving your details. In these cases, an NHS Number would not be used by the healthcare service.

1.16 Will using my NHS Number change the way my health information is shared?

Having your NHS Number on your medical records will not change how and when healthcare providers share information about you. An NHS Number is simply a much more reliable way of matching your records to you.

1.17 Do I need an NHS Number to apply for a European Health Insurance Card?

You don't need an NHS Number to apply for the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) although the websites related to the EHIC normally ask for your NHS Number. Your NHS Number is not used as part of your application and will not be put on the card. You can go to the EHIC website at

<http://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcareabroad/pages/healthcareabroad.aspx>

You need your National Insurance (NI) Number for your EHIC application as it is used for tax, benefits and pensions reasons. If you have any questions about your NI number you should visit the Department for Work and Pensions website at www.dwp.gov.uk. Your NI number is not used for health reasons because not everybody has one (for example, children under 16).

If you are applying for one of your dependants who does not have an NI Number they will be added to your EHIC card as a dependant, using your NI Number.

2 Medical cards

2.1 Are there any plans to give everyone with an NHS Number a card with their NHS Number on it?

There are no plans to give everyone with an NHS Number card that contains their NHS Number. However, when you registered with your GP Practice they will have given you a medical card or letter with your NHS Number.

You should keep your NHS Number in a place where you can find it quickly and easily. The NHS sometimes includes your NHS Number in documents they send to you, like appointment letters, prescriptions and so on.

If you have a medical card that you received before 1996, it will have an old NHS Number which we no longer use. Your local PCT can provide your new NHS Number To find out the phone number for your PCT visit the following NHS Choices website and enter your postcode.

[Http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust](http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust)

When you phone your local PCT, ask for the department that deals with enquiries about NHS Number. Staff will take your name, date of birth, address and then give you a medical card with your NHS Number on it, usually within two days.

3 Foreign nationals living in the UK

3.1 I'm now a UK resident, but am originally from a foreign country. How do I apply for an NHS Number?

If you live in England or Wales, you will be able to register with a local doctor who will give you an NHS Number. To register, find your local doctor and ask to register with them. You can find details of available doctors in your local area by:

- finding the phone number from the phone book; or
- going online to use the NHS Choices website at <http://www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx>

If you have difficulty registering with a doctor, your local PCT will be able to help you.

Having an NHS Number does not mean you get free NHS treatment. For further details on this please visit

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Entitlementsandcharges/OverseasVisitors/index.htm>

4 Free NHS treatment

4.1 If I have an NHS Number can I have free hospital treatment?

No, having an NHS Number does not automatically mean you get free NHS treatment if you are not already entitled to it. Your NHS Number helps healthcare staff find your care records and means they can provide you with better, safer care.

For further details on whether you can get free hospital treatment see Department of Health guidance at

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Entitlementsandcharges/OverseasVisitors/Browsable/DH_074374

5 Babies and the NHS Number

5.1 How do babies get their NHS Number?

Babies born in a hospital in England and Wales are given an NHS Number soon after they are born. Your baby will normally be given an NHS Number while they are still in hospital. If your baby was born at home, they will get their NHS Number when the midwife registers the birth.

It is important that babies are given their NHS Number at birth as routine tests and medical treatments are usually carried out in the first six weeks. Names, addresses and other details for you and your baby may change over time, but knowing and using your baby's NHS Number from birth means the healthcare staff supporting you and providing your baby's care can correctly identify your baby's test results and records from the start.

You can then make sure your baby's NHS Number is used on all your baby's documents, including birth notifications, discharge letters and labels. This will help us correctly identify your baby, no matter which organisation or staff are supporting and providing your baby's care. If the hospital or midwife has not given you your baby's NHS Number you should ask them for it.

6 GP Practice information

6.1 Do I need to know my NHS Number before I can register with a GP Practice?

No, a GP Practice can register you without your NHS Number, although it is helpful if you already know it. Practice staff should ask you to fill in a 'GMS1' form. Your medical records, including your NHS Number will then be transferred from your current GP practice to your new GP Practice.

You can contact your local PCT to ask them to provide you with your NHS Number.

To find the phone number for your local PCT, visit the NHS Choices website at the following address and enter your postcode.

[Http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust](http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust)

When you phone your local PCT, ask for the department that deals with enquiries about NHS Number. Registration staff will take your name, date of birth, address and then send you a medical card with your NHS Number on it, usually within two days.

6.2 If I have never registered with a GP Practice, will I have an NHS Number?

No, if you have never registered with a GP Practice you will not have an NHS Number. You will be given an NHS Number after you have registered with a local GP Practice.

To find the phone number for your local PCT, visit the NHS Choices website at the following address and enter your postcode.

[Http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust](http://www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?SearchType=PCT&ServiceType=Trust)

When you phone your local PCT, ask for the department that deals with enquiries about NHS Numbers. Registration staff will take your name, date of birth, address and then send you a medical card with your NHS Number on it, usually within two days.

