

# People with hidden disabilities can access Blue Badges for the first time from today

- extension to Blue Badge scheme comes into force in England today for people who have non-visible disabilities, making travel easier
- new online eligibility check launched to make it simpler for people applying for the badges
- today marks the biggest change to the scheme in nearly 50 years

People with hidden disabilities, including anxiety disorders or a brain injury, can apply for a Blue Badge for the first time from today (30 August 2019).

The Department for Transport (DfT) has issued [new guidance to councils](#) in England on [Blue Badge parking permit eligibility](#), along with a new online eligibility checker to make the scheme clearer for people before they apply.

In the biggest change to Blue Badges since the 1970s, the DfT has been working with specialists to expand the eligibility criteria for the badges, which now includes people who cannot walk as part of a journey without considerable psychological distress or the risk of serious harm.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

We know that for some people, the possibility of not being able to find a parking space can make even leaving the house a challenge, which is why the Blue Badge is so important.

The scheme, which is already a lifeline for so many disabled people, will make a huge difference to those with non-visible conditions such as autism, dementia, Parkinson's and arthritis. It is my sincere wish that these changes will improve even more people's lives.

The government's ambitious [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#), changes to the Blue Badge scheme and the [Access for All](#) programme will continue the UK's internationally-leading plans for fully-accessible transport.

The Blue Badge scheme already means people with physical disabilities can park closer to their destination than other drivers, as they are less able to take public transport or walk longer distances.

Plans to [extend the scheme to those with non-visible conditions were announced last summer](#) following an 8 week consultation. It is an important part of the government's drive for greater parity between physical and mental

health.

It will offer a lifeline to people who often find road travel difficult by providing better access to work and other amenities, while also helping combat loneliness by helping them stay connected to family and friends.

Minister for Disabled People Justin Tomlinson said:

Today is a pivotal moment for thousands of people with hidden disabilities across the country, many of whom face unacceptable discrimination or even abuse when using disabled parking spaces.

The changes we're making will be life-changing for these disabled people, allowing them to go about their daily lives without experiencing unnecessary stress or worry.

To help councils with the expected increase in applications, the department has agreed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide £1.7 million in the first year of the programme.

The expanded scheme coincides with the launch of a review intended to improve enforcement, and help councils tackle fraudulent use of the badges.

At the end of 2018, the Local Government Association estimated that the theft of Blue Badges had risen by 45% in 12 months and was up six-fold since 2013.

The review will look at ensuring Blue Badges are used correctly and improving public understanding so that those with non-visible disabilities can use the badges with confidence.

A task group will also be set up with key organisations to gather ideas and evidence on how to improve the consistency of council enforcement to tackle fraud and misuse.

Tim Nicholls, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at the National Autistic Society, said:

We are delighted to see the new Blue Badge rules come into force. This will be a huge relief for thousands of autistic people and their families in England, many of whom are so anxious about things going wrong that they find it hard to leave the house at all.

A Blue Badge can be life changing. To live up to this promise, it's absolutely essential that council officials making decisions about Blue Badges understand autism and the challenges autistic people can face getting out and about.

While the new criteria will give clear and consistent guidelines on Blue Badge eligibility for the whole of England, not everyone with non-visible

disabilities will qualify for a badge. It will be up to the relevant local authority to decide if an applicant meets the eligibility criteria, as is currently the case.

Councils may need to review parking provision to increase the number of spaces, both in terms of the availability of disabled parking, and the overall number of parking spaces if disabled spaces take up other existing parking spaces.

Last year, the government set out its plans to improve accessibility across all modes of transport in the [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#), which aims to make the UK's transport network fully inclusive by 2030.