

Pharmacy First Programme

Please find below the Dear Colleague that I have received from the Government concerning the Pharmacy First Programme.

31 January 2024

Dear Colleague,

Pharmacy First Launch

We all know that pharmacies are an integral part of the fabric of our communities, an easily accessible front door to the NHS, staffed by highly trained and skilled healthcare professionals. Four in five of us can reach our local community pharmacy within a 20-minute walk and there are, on average, twice as many pharmacies in the most deprived communities.

Today we are launching the new Pharmacy First service, making even better use of our highly trained community pharmacists. For the first time ever, community pharmacies in England will be able to offer NHS consultations and supply prescription-only medicines without a prescription from a GP for seven common conditions. The seven conditions are: earache, sinusitis, sore throat, impetigo, infected insect bite, shingles, and uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women (under the age of 65).

In May last year, the Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care announced an investment in community pharmacy of up to £645million to:

- Expand the number of blood pressure checks in community pharmacy by an additional 2.5 million checks by the end of 2024/25 (currently at 900,000 per year), potentially preventing more than 1,350 heart attacks and strokes in 2023/24 as well as reducing the risks for tens of thousands of others.
- Expand the contraception service to include initial oral contraception consultations. This reduces barriers for women in accessing contraception because rather than making a GP appointment, they can simply visit their local pharmacy. NHS England estimate that almost half a million women will be able to access the pill through their pharmacy by 2024/25.
- Introduce a Pharmacy First service.

The Department and NHS England have worked closely with Community Pharmacy England, the representative body of all pharmacy contractors in England, on the detail of the three services. The funding for additional blood pressure checks is already flowing to community pharmacies, with contraception services being expanded from 1 December.

Completing this set of delivery milestones is the launch of Pharmacy First. This builds on existing clinical services already introduced in community pharmacy; such as the ability for GPs, NHS111 and Urgent and Emergency Care to refer patients to a community pharmacist

for a minor illness consultation and NHS111 and Urgent and Emergency Care to refer patients an urgent medicine supply. From today this will become part of the wider Pharmacy First Service.

Over 10,000 community pharmacies (circa 95 percent) have signed up to start offering Pharmacy First to their communities. Patients will be able to walk into a pharmacy to access the service or they may be referred to a community pharmacy by their GP, NHS111 or UEC.

This Government has a clear plan to back the pharmacy workforce. The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan commits £2.4 billion to fund additional education and training places over the next five years. This includes an ambition to increase training places for pharmacists across England by nearly 50 percent to around 5,000 by 2031/32, and to grow the number of pharmacy technicians.

NHS England has also invested £15.9 million on pharmacy professional career development. NHS England and the Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education offer a range of support to upskill the current workforce with clinical examination skills.

From 2026 all newly qualified pharmacists will be independent prescribers on the day of registration. This will equip pharmacists with the skills and knowledge to provide even more clinical care and expand the clinical role of pharmacists across the NHS including in community pharmacy. I look forward to working with the sector to build further on Pharmacy First to use these new skills to benefit patients.

I have attached a breakdown of the number of pharmacies that have signed up to deliver Pharmacy First in each integrated care system for your information (Annex A).

The Government has a clear vision to support pharmacists to evolve into a more clinically focused role, with members of the public able to take full advantage of their skills and capabilities. Pharmacy First shows we are serious about delivering against this vision.

This is part of our plan to make the NHS and social care system faster, simpler and fairer for us all.

Best wishes,



THE RT HON DAME ANDREA LEADSOM DBE MP

ICB Name	Number of community pharmacies opted into Pharmacy First as of end of 28 January 2023
BUCKS, OXFORDSHIRE & BERKSHIRE WEST ICB	246